CONCEPTS OF MYTH AND RITUAL, AND CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE

1880 - 1970

by

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ABSTRACT

This work is a study of the various concepts and theories of myth and ritual as they are found in some non-literary disciplines, especially anthropology, in literary theory, and in the criticism of Shakespeare. It is divided into two parts. Part I discusses various theories of myth and ritual and the relation of these theories to literature in general. It consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the allegorical theory of myth, and tries to show that the idea of myth as allegory persists in literary criticism, even though it has generally been discarded in theory. It suggests that the majority of criticism in terms of myth and ritual can, in fact, be seen as the extension to literary material of the kind of allegorical and typological exegesis that has been widely practised in scriptural hermeneutic from very early times. This suggestion is tested with reference to Shakespeare-criticism in Chapter 6 in Part II.

Chapter 2 discusses the idea of ritual and the specifically anthropological theories concerning the connexions between myth, ritual, and drama. It is suggested here that the idea of ritual as such, and a psychological-cum-sociological extension of the concept of the scapegoat may be critically more valuable than the mere tracing of the origins of works of art in primitive rituals. Chapter 3 discusses ideas concerning a special mythical mode of thought, emphasis being placed here on the theory of Ernst Cassirer. Chapter 4 is concerned with the theories of Northrop Frye and Lévi-Strauss, who are both, in their very different ways, interested in the 'structural' approach to myth. Chapter 5 surveys theories concerning the social role of myth and ritual and also discusses the relation between myth and ideology. It is proposed here that application of anthropological theories of myth and ritual in literary criticism should logically lead to a sociological approach to the work of art.

Part II is also divided into five chapters, each surveying the existing 'myth' criticism of Shakespeare in the light of the theories outlined in the corresponding chapter in Part I. It emerges from this survey that contrary to the common impression, the influence of anthropological theory, especially of the theories that come after Frazer and the 'Cambridge' anthropologists, has been relatively slight where actual criticism is concerned. In fact, we find that the overwhelming majority of the criticism of Shakespeare in terms of myth is really an extension of allegorical mythography to secular, literary works. In such criticism there is usually an assumption that the work under consideration is of mythical or scriptural status and hides some profound and universal truth. Sometimes, however, such criticism may also be seen as an attempt to raise the work of art to the status of myth.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The term myth has a protean life in contemporary criticism. Several writers have written on the 'meanings' of the term in modern criticism and some have also written on the 'myth of myth'.[1] What has come to be known as 'myth criticism' or the 'myth and ritual approach' has elicited hostile as well as enthusiastic responses. For example, in an article written in 1957 Herbert Weisinger claims that 'the "myth and ritual approach" to literature is now one of the high gods in the pantheon of contemporary criticism, and it numbers among its devotees not a few eminently respectable names'. Though Weisinger makes some reservations about some uses of the term myth, it is clear from this essay that he is one of its devotees. On the other hand, William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks express grave doubts about this new god in Literary Criticism: A Short History, which was published in the same year. 'Surely the hugest cloudy symbol,' they write, 'the most threatening, of our last ten or fifteen years in criticism is the principle

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[1] Herbert Weisinger and Harry Levin have written essays with identical titles: 'Some Meanings of Myth'. Weisinger's essay can be found in The Agony and the Triumph and Levin's in Refractions. See also the entries under the following names in the Bibliography: Haskell M. Block, Daniel Russell Brown, Ruby Cohn, W. W. Douglas, O. B. Hardison, E. W. Herd, C. S. Lewis, Walter J. Ong, Donald A. Stauffer, and William Troy. The following are useful anthologies of essays on myth and literature: Myth: A Symposium, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok; Myth and Mythmaking, edited by Henry A. Murray; and Myth and Literature, edited by John B. Vickery. The whole of Chimera, 4, No. 3 (Spring 1946) is also devoted to myth. (N.B. In this and all subsequent footnotes only the titles of the articles or books are given, along with the pages referred to. For full bibliographical information the reader is referred to the Bibliography. But details of some brief articles or of works referred to only in passing are given only in the notes.)

of criticism by myth and ritual origins.'[2] To investigate the nature of this cloudy symbol or this new god (indeed a Protean god, as will be evident from the pages that follow) is the purpose of this work.

Each of the terms myth and ritual signifies a plurality of objects. For example, myth (or mythical) can be used for any of the following: the philosophical fables of Plato; the stories of the Bororo Indians; the kind of thinking that goes into such practices as alchemy, astrology, and various magical rites; a special, and 'higher', mode of insight that is denied to rational man; powerful social and political ideas; distorted history; and lies or errors. To attempt to define such a term is clearly futile. In fact, even when there is agreement about the class of objects signified by the term (for example, that myth refers to 'stories about the gods'), there are various ways of looking at these objects and hence various theories about their nature. The most useful thing to do with such terms, I believe, is to examine their various uses and to classify them according to the theories that they implicitly or explicitly assume or imply. This is what I propose to do in Part I of the present work.

This study is not intended, however, to be an exhaustive analysis of the various concepts and theories of myth and ritual. It is primarily concerned with these theories and concepts as they impinge upon literary criticism. But even 'literary criticism' is too large and too vague a field, and in any case there has been far too much theorizing about myth and its relevance to literary criticism in the abstract, often in an oracular manner, to justify yet another essay on the same topic. A really useful discussion of critical concepts must, I believe, be anchored in the actual criticism of works of literature. It is ultimately in terms of their usefulness in throwing light on actual works that the

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[2] Weisinger, 'The Myth and Ritual Approach to Shakespearean Tragedy', p. 142; Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 733.

value of critical concepts is to be judged. The criterion of usefulness does not, of course, imply that if a particular theory or approach to myth and ritual has not been extended and applied to literary works on a large scale, then it is useless. One must think of potential applications as well as actual ones. In fact, some of the approaches to myth and ritual that I shall be outlining have been less popular than others among literary critics, but they might prove to be more valuable in the long run.

The criticism of the works of Shakespeare seems to be an obvious choice when trying to examine the actual working of critical concepts. This is so not only because within the field of Shakespeare-criticism can be seen the largest variety of critical approaches and nuances of critical usage, both representative and eccentric, but also because the subject-matter is interesting in its own right. Moreover, it is hoped that this examination of the concepts of myth and ritual as they have been applied to the works of Shakespeare will not only bring into some order a very confused field of literary theory, but also manage to throw some incidental and partial light on the works themselves.

As far as I am aware, only two critics, Herbert Weisinger and Robert Hapgood, have so far discussed the kind of criticism of Shakespeare that makes use of the concepts of myth and ritual. Herbert Weisinger has written often on the subject and has himself discussed some plays of Shakespeare in terms of what he describes as the 'myth and ritual pattern'. But Weisinger is far from certain who these myth and ritual critics are. In one essay he writes:

> To prove how widespread is the application of the myth and ritual approach to Shakespeare I simply call attention to the reversal in attitude toward G. Wilson Knight in the thirty years since Myth and Miracles [sic] was first published. The map of Shakespeare's spiritual progress "from spiritual pain and despairing thought through stoic acceptance to a serene and mystic joy" which Knight first sketched and which was greeted with derision and hostility has now been accepted as the most illuminating guide of all; and indeed, one can almost plot the widening acceptance of Knight by graphing

> the increasing amount of space given Knight and his followers in each succeeding issue of Shakespeare Survey.

Apart from the fact that Weisinger does not mention who Knight's followers are, which makes it difficult to test the above statement, it is noteworthy that in a later note on the same subject he expresses doubt whether Knight can be described as a myth and ritual critic at all.[3]

Robert Hapgood has surveyed the 'myth and ritual' criticism of Shakespeare in an article in Shakespeare Survey (1962) entitled 'Shakespeare and the Ritualists'. There is an implication here, as in Weisinger's essays, that this kind of criticism stems from the work of anthropologists, especially Frazer and the so-called 'Cambridge anthropologists', in particular, Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, and Francis Cornford. But in Hapgood's essay also we can see a certain vagueness about the identity of the 'ritualists' of his title. For example, he mentions Philip Wheelwright's discussion of the 'myth of love and the myth of divine and earthly governance',[4] but it is far from clear what this use of the term myth has got to do with the theories of Frazer and other anthropologists. This vagueness about the nature of myth and ritual criticism is brought out by another example. C. L. Barber's book Shakespeare's Festive Comedy makes use of anthropological ideas, but in a subtle and judicious manner. Barber does mention Frazer a few times and discusses the role of saturnalian festivity and scapegoat rituals in Elizabethan society and in the drama of Shakespeare. But to describe him, on the basis of this, as a 'mythicist' or as an exponent of the 'anthropo-archetypal approach' throws light neither on his work nor on these approaches, especially as the ideas of myth and archetype

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[3] 'Myth, Method, and Shakespeare', pp. 38-9; 'Myth and Ritual Approaches'.

[4] p. 121.

do not appear in his book at all.[5]

Both Hapgood and Weisinger seem to be aware of the diversity of 'myth and ritual' criticism. In fact, Weisinger uses the plural in the title of one of his articles on the subject: 'Myth and Ritual Approaches'. But in spite of this, neither of them provides a theoretical framework within which this diverse material could be meaningfully arranged. Moreover, they assume in practice that the field is far more unified than it actually is. Weisinger, in particular, concentrates on only one of the various 'myth and ritual approaches', namely, that which seeks to examine literary works in the light of a universal 'myth and ritual pattern'. This pattern is generally regarded as reflecting mankind's continuing concern with the theme of death and rebirth. This is indeed the most popular kind of myth criticism and the one generally implied by the terms the myth and ritual approach or myth criticism. (But for the sake of brevity I shall sometimes use these terms in place of some such circumlocution as 'criticism that makes use of any of the several theories of myth and ritual'.) Hapgood covers a large amount of very diverse material in his brief survey and provides a very valuable bibliography. But in his case also one is left wondering what, if anything, all the critics that he mentions have in common. The blanket term 'ritualists' obscures many discriminations that ought, I believe, to be made.

The present work is intended to provide a classification, necessary, I believe, if much confusion and mystification is to be avoided, of the various uses of the terms myth and ritual according to the theories that they assume or imply, and then to discuss the existing myth criticism of Shakespeare according to this classification. The plan of the work is as follows. In the first part I discuss the various theories about myth and ritual as they appear in anthropological,

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[5]The term 'mythicist' is used by John W. Velz, Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition, p. 127, and the term 'anthropo-archetypal approach' by Lawrence J. Ross in a review of Approaches to Shakespeare, edited by Norman Rabkin, in Shakespeare Quarterly, 16 (1965), p. 358.

psychological, and philosophical writings and try to show how these are related to literary theory. In the second part of the book I discuss the actual criticism of Shakespeare. The book thus proceeds towards increasing particularization: from the discussion of myth in general to myth as used in literary theory to myth as applied to the work of Shakespeare. However, this plan is not followed strictly, especially while dealing with the first two steps down the ladder of abstraction, largely because it was not always found convenient to organize the material according to a strict plan.

In Chapter 1 in the first part I discuss what I have described as the allegorical theory of myth and suggest that this theory is implicitly operative in a large proportion of the actual criticism of literary works in terms of myth or archetypes, even when it has generally been discarded on the explicit theoretical level. I also suggest that a good deal of criticism making use of ideas about the 'dying god' or the 'Year-Daimon' can be profitably seen in the light of this theory. In Chapter 6,in the second part of the book,I try to show that a very large proportion of the criticism of Shakespeare in terms of myth can be seen as the application of this theory (or implicit idea) of myth. The inclusion of some psychoanalytical criticism within this category may seem arbitrary and far-fetched. I do not, however, intend to imply any comment about the truth of psychoanalytical theory, but only this, that some of this criticism resembles allegorical criticism more than it resembles clinical analysis. This is especially true of the earlier psychoanalysts, who were, in any case, deeply interested in myth and ritual. Generally speaking, psychoanalytic discussions which leave depth analysis and enter the field of comparative mythology tend to turn psychoanalysis into a 'dictionary of symbols' which can help the analyst to short-circuit the tedious process of clinical investigation. In other words they proceed by comparisons and analogies, which are the basic tools of allegorical criticism. Freud, of course, was aware that psychoanalysis can never provide such a dictionary, but any assumption of the universality of certain

symbols must ultimately lead to such a dictionary. Besides, psychoanalysis throws new light on the traditional idea of allegory as a way of 'other speaking'. However, in its formal analysis of the way in which the mind functions in the formation of myth and literature (as distinguished from psychoanalytical interpretations of the 'meaning' of particular myths or works of art) psychoanalysis is, of course, very different from allegorical criticism.

Chapter 2 concentrates on theories about ritual and its connections with myth, literature, and drama. It is in this area that anthropological theory (by which is often meant only the theories of Frazer, Jane Harrison, and a few others) has made its greatest impact. This is especially true of the theory of tragedy, which has been greatly influenced by ideas about primitive scapegoat rituals.

Chapter 3 discusses theories which postulate a mythical mode of thought of which not only myths and rituals but a wide variety of other cultural phenomena are supposed to be manifestations. In this chapter I lay special emphasis on the theories of Ernst Cassirer because it is in his writings that this concept of the mythical mode of thought is developed most fully and with the intellectual rigour of a philosopher. I discern two broad divisions within this approach to myth. Cassirer considers myth to be one of the several symbolic forms through which Man constructs reality, reality being, in his Kantian perspective, not something objectively given but something that one has to reconstruct symbolically. Myth in this sense has its own epistemology and structure, and much of Cassirer's work on myth is devoted to analysing and describing this structure of mythical thought, much as a large part of Freud's work is concerned with the analysis of the structure of unconscious thought. However, according to Cassirer, myth is but one of several symbolic forms in which we perceive reality, the others being science, art, religion, philosophy, and history. In fact Cassirer has also emphasized the danger of mythical thought when it intrudes into other realms such as science or the world of political action.

There are other writers, however, who seem to assign, though sometimes only implicitly, a special status to the reality apprehended through the mythical consciousness and hence to myth itself. In such usage myth becomes merely a synonym for religion or for any kind of belief in a transcendental reality. In actual practice it is this honorific sense of the term that has been more popular among literary critics.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the theories of two contemporary writers who have been preoccupied with myth. Both Northrop Frye and Lévi-Strauss are concerned not only with myth but also, in their different ways, with structural analysis. Northrop Frye considers myth to be a structural principle of literature and tries to combine anthropological theories of myth and ritual with Aristotelian concepts. Lévi-Strauss is concerned with the structure of myth rather than with myth as a structural principle, but he also seems to believe that in myth one can observe the structure of the human mind in its least distorted form and hence that if one could analyse the structure of myth one could also discover the structure of the human mind itself. Both Lévi-Strauss and Northrop Frye, in other words, attach great importance to myths as elementary structures. I also try to suggest briefly how Lévi-Strauss's method of analysing myths is compatible with certain familiar modes of structural analysis of literary works.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the relation of myth to society (and much of what is said of myth here would also apply to ritual). Anthropologists from Malinowski onwards have emphasized the social function of myth in primitive culture. (Lévi-Strauss's theories may be seen as an attempt to reverse this trend, but I do not think that they are necessarily that.) However, literary critics have been relatively uninterested in the social aspect of myth. They have been more concerned with its universal meaning than with its function in particular societies.

The classification of the various approaches to myth that I have outlined above does not pretend to be exhaustive. Neither does

it claim to be the only classification possible.[6] Indeed there may be many meanings of the term that I have failed to catch, and I share the difficulty of many writers who often find it impossible to understand the meaning of the word. Such common significations of the word as 'distortions' or 'lies' have also been excluded because I believe that they are not critically very valuable. There is a great deal of simplification and slurring over important differences within the broad approaches I have outlined, but such distortions are inevitable in a work of this kind. There is, moreover, considerable overlapping among the divisions I have made. Nevertheless, I believe that the above classification does help to organize a large and confused mass of material in a way that is useful from the point of view of literary theory.

In the second part of the book I survey the existing myth criticism of Shakespeare. Chapters 6 to 10 correspond to Chapters 1 to 5 respectively. Again, it would be foolish to claim exhaustiveness in the survey, but I would be surprised if a radically different kind of myth criticism of Shakespeare were to be found. In Chapters 6 and 7 I survey the available criticism on all the plays and poems. The plays are divided into four groups, comedies, tragedies, histories, and romances, and within each group they are generally discussed in chronological order. This play-by-play approach is abandoned in the three subsequent chapters, first, because much of the criticism discussed there is of a general nature rather than concerned with the analysis of individual plays, and secondly, because the relative paucity of material made this approach unsuitable. The year 1880 was chosen only as an approximate date, without intending to imply that myth criticism begins only then. Indeed, there were discussions of the 'fairy mythology' of Shakespeare even in the 1840s and some early source studies traced the sources of the plays to legends and myths.

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[6] For a different classification see Percy Cohen, 'Theories of Myth', p. 338.

Moreover, Karl Simrock pointed out parallels in German folk rituals to the story of Birnam Wood in Macbeth in 1870. But, as I shall try to show, the first critic who can properly be called a myth critic is W.F.C. Wigston, one of whose books on Shakespeare, A New Study of Shakespeare, first appeared in 1884. Wigston anticipates most of the common themes of modern myth criticism, and E.A.J. Honigmann has rightly pointed out the pioneering role of this now-forgotten critic.[7]

I should point out here that I am not concerned with another kind of interest in myth that can be associated with the criticism of Shakespeare. This is the study of similes, metaphors, and allusions drawn from the realm of mythology. This is a kind of 'imagery' study which has been done with thoroughness by Robert Kilburn Root and Douglas Bush. Among the critics who discuss Shakespeare's conscious use of myths, I shall be concerned only with those who try to show that these allusions to myths have a structural function and that they determine the significance of the work in a substantial way. In other words, I shall only discuss those critics whose analysis of the role of mythical allusions in Shakespeare seems to imply that he uses myths much in the manner of T. S. Eliot. Such critics are in a small minority; the majority are content to use myths to unify their perceptions of the plays without implying that Shakespeare consciously tried to unify the plays by what T. S. Eliot has described as the 'mythical method'.[8]

It will be observed that there is often a considerable gap between the theoretical discussion in the first part of this book and the discussion of the actual criticism of Shakespeare in the second. I have not tried to obscure this gap by narrowing the theoretical discussion in the retrospective light of the practical criticism because I feel that it is useful to bring out the fact that there is this gap between theoretical promise

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[7]See the discussions of A Midsummer-Night's Dream, Macbeth, and the romances, especially The Winter's Tale, in Chapter 6.

[8]See Chapter 4.

and actual criticism. Far too much has been written about myth and about the myth and ritual approach and far too little in the way of analysis of the actual criticism. To illustrate the gap between critical theory and practice, and between the use of the concepts of myth and ritual in literary criticism and in anthropology and other disciplines may be useful. Literary criticism, it will be seen, has lagged behind anthropology, which would not matter at all but for the fact that myth criticism has become associated with anthropology and often overdraws on this credit. But the vast majority of the so-called myth criticism has little to do with anthropology, least of all with <u>contemporary</u> anthropology.

I hope that the survey in Part II will have an interest independent of its function as illustration of the theories discussed in the first part. Not all the approaches to Shakespeare in terms of myth and ritual are of equal interest, but each one of them may give some useful insights into the work. One cannot talk generally about the value of the myth and ritual approach and about its contribution towards a better understanding of Shakespeare because, as I have said, there are several myth and ritual approaches. I have indicated in the course of the discussion of the actual criticism what I consider to be valuable points about the plays, but a clear and consistent picture of Shakespeare in the light of myth criticism does not emerge.

PART I

CHAPTER 1

MYTH AS ALLEGORY

The theory of myth as an allegory embodying a timeless truth is the oldest of all theories of myth. As early as the sixth century B.C. Xenophanes complained of the immorality of the Homeric gods and Theagenes attempted to justify Homer by considering the gods as personifications of human faculties or natural elements. In spite of Plato's criticism of the allegorical interpretation of myths, it continued throughout antiquity.[1] One common form of allegorization was to equate the gods with the planets or constellations. In the Middle Ages, this kind of equation was active not only in astrology, but also, through the concept of man as a microcosm, in medicine and alchemy.[2] Max Müller's 'solar mythology' can also be considered as a version of naturalized mythology.

The moralizing of myths is as old as the naturalizing of them. It was most extensively used by the Stoics and Neoplatonists. It is to the latter that the still current idea of myth as mystery can be traced. Thus Sallust maintained that the true meaning of myth was apparent only to the initiate.[3] The same idea can be traced in the Renaissance Neoplatonists like Pico della Mirandola and Ficino. There was initial

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[1] See J.A. Stewart, The Myths of Plato, pp. 223, 235.

[2] See the chapters on the 'Physical' and the 'Encyclopedic' traditions in Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods.

[3] Seznec, p. 87.

hostility to the allegorical interpretation of myths from the early Christian fathers, but it was a method which Jewish theologians had begun to apply to the Old Testament even before Philo and Origen finally laid the theoretical foundation for allegorical Christian interpretation of the Bible.[4]

The allegorical interpretation of the Bible was often combined with a typological exegesis. Two types of typology have been discerned: (a) the recognition of historical correspondences between events or persons in the Old Testament and similar events or persons in the New, the latter being considered as 'fulfilment' of the former in history; and (b) a 'quasi-Platonist' doctrine of the relation of the literal sense to 'eternal spiritual realities' hidden behind the literal sense. 'Type' in this latter view is a 'mystery', a 'quasi-sacramental presentation of reality'.[5] It is the first kind of exegesis that has received the sanction of orthodox theology. Its motto could be St. Augustine's statement: 'In the Old Testament the New lies hid; in the New Testament the meaning of the Old becomes clear.' Theologians have emphasized that this clarification of meaning takes place in history and that therefore it is very different from non-historical allegorization. Thus, when St. Paul finds an analogy between the relation of husband and wife and the relation of Christ to the Church (Epist. Eph. V. 22-23), which leads him to read Gen. II:24 as written concerning Christ and his church, it is not so much an 'allegorization of the marriage of Adam and Eve' as a recognition that 'in the oneness of the church with Christ the promise that was inherent in the oneness of Adam and Eve came to its fulfilment'.[6]

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[4]See the essay, 'The Biblical Origins and Patristic Development of Typology', in G.W.H. Lampe and K.J. Woollcombe, Essays on Typology : Studies in Biblical Theology (henceforth referred to as Lampe). See also J.A. Stewart, pp. 226-230.

[5]Lampe, p. 30.

[6]See J.D. Smart, The Interpretation of Scripture, pp. 114-15.

Often, however, typological exegesis amounted to no more than the finding of parallels between the old and the new Testaments. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, finds a parallel between Moses stretching his hands to stay the plague of frogs and Christ on the Cross stretching his to banish 'frog-like thoughts'.[7] From such analogizing to the finding of parallels between pagan myth and Christian scripture is only a short step, a step which, in fact, was taken early by the Gnostics, who combined allegorical interpretations of the mystery cults and the myths associated with them with biblical material.

It would be convenient at this point to discuss the second kind of typology referred to above before proceeding further. Philo uses the term 'archetype' to refer to ideas conceived by God himself; this is reproduced as 'type' or 'paradigm' in the minds of the prophets, and the 'copy' or 'shadow' of the 'type' is in turn transmitted to the many.[8] This is a more obviously allegorical approach than the historical typology discussed above and has been criticized because it tends to merge biblical and classical material and deny the uniqueness of Christianity. Thus, a modern theologian writes:

> Why should a scriptural allegory have more value than a good allegorical interpretation of any other book? Many of the lessons which Alexandrian exegetes draw with such desperate ingenuity from the ceremonial Law of Moses might, one could suppose, have been taken with less trouble from Homer or any other non-Biblical writings. Pagan mythology, indeed, might provide as good a field as the Scriptures for the exercise of such methods, and the Peratic Gnostics described by Hippolytus evidently recognized this fact and combined allegorical interpretation of the mystery-cult legends with material drawn from Christian Biblical sources.[9]

A kind of syncretism is, in fact, the natural consequence of allegorical interpretation since if an archetype is shadowed forth in a type and thence in a copy, and is otherwise unknowable, a multiplicity of types and copies could be thought of as shadowing forth the one and only

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[7] Cited in Lampe, p. 36.

[8] Ibid., p. 63.

[9] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

archetype. In the Middle Ages this syncretism continued, though well within the pale of orthodoxy. As Jean Seznec points out, the medieval genius for allegory renews the tradition of the early Fathers and finds 'anticipations of the New Covenant in Old Testament characters and episodes of Fable as prefigurations of Christian truth'. Moses and Hercules are often equated, and in a text from the fourteenth century, Ovid Moralisé, Actaeon is equated with Christ himself.[10]

During the Renaissance the most famous mythographers were Lilio Giraldi, Natali Conti and Vincenzo Cartari. All of them were widely read and translated and, according to Seznec, at least one of them, Cartari, could have been read by Shakespeare.[11] They continued the allegorical interpretation of myths of which Boccaccio's Genealogy of the Gods and Fulgentius's earlier Mythologiae (sixth century) were influential medieval examples. In the three Italian mythographers of the sixteenth century mentioned above, however, there is the new element of illustrations from oriental myths. For example, in a reprint of Cartari's The Images of the Gods in the early seventeenth century there is an appendix with discourse on the gods of Mexico and Japan! Conti, significantly, was hailed as a precursor by French historians of religion in the nineteenth century.[12] Syncretism, however, was even more marked in the Renaissance Humanists. Allegorical and typological interpretations, as well as an approach to comparative religion, became the modes of reconciling pagan myth with Christianity. As Seznec points out, with the help of Neoplatonic doctrine the humanists discovered in mythology 'something other and much greater than a concealed morality : they discovered religious teaching -- the Christian doctrine itself'. Thus, Plato is equated with Moses, Socrates is held to 'confirm' Christ. Erasmus maintains that there is more benefit to be had from reading the classical fables with their allegorical content in mind than from the Scriptures taken literally. Seznec also mentions Mutianus Rufus who reaches the brink of heresy when he writes that

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[10] Seznec, pp. 90 ff. [11] Ibid., p. 315. [12] Ibid, p. 248.

there is 'but one god and one goddess, but many are their power and names : Jupiter, Sol, Apollo etc.'. However, Rufus points out, one should have care in speaking these things : 'They should be hidden in silence as are the Eleusinian mysteries; sacred things must needs be wrapped in fable and enigma.' Rufus adds the further comment (to save his skin, it seems): 'When I say Jupiter, understand me to mean Christ and the true God.'[13] Douglas Bush cites another instance of syncretism in William Lily's Latin grammar where 'Our Father . . . ' becomes 'O Pater omnipotens, clarique habitator Olympi'.[14]

The allegorical-typological interpretation of myths and the Bible has served two main functions. First of all, such interpretation can have a propagandist or didactic function. It can, in other words, be a species of rhetoric. The mana with which the myth is informed is transferred, as it were, to the idea being propagated. The didact draws upon the myths as the most effective strategy to awe his audience into accepting his ideas. The aura of mystery that he creates around the myths in the very process of ostensibly clarifying the mystery envelops his own ideas, thus giving them a certain sanctity. Often the ideas sought to be propagated clash with the dogmas of religion, or keep an uneasy peace with them. Allegorical interpretation has always incurred the suspicion of orthodox Christian theology and has been most frequently employed by Neoplatonic and Gnostic thinkers, always heretical or on the brink of heresy.

The second function of allegorical interpretation is to reconcile: the past with the present, one culture and religion with another, or all cultures and religions into a universal culture and religion. By allegorizing a myth, or an episode from the Bible, it is possible to protect it from the onslaught of a more 'rationalistic' or critical age whose standards of credibility or acceptability are strained if it is to

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[13] Ibid., pp. 98-9.

[14] Douglas Bush, Pagan Myth and Christian Tradition in English Poetry, p. 5.

be taken literally. Allegory thus becomes an act of cultural or religious piety. Such piety is perhaps necessary for the spiritual health of a society, which would otherwise disintegrate under a radical mythoclasm. Allegorical interpretation, in other words, reinstates myth in the sense of a story about gods which is believed to be true as myth in the sense of a story containing a hidden timeless truth, allegorically expressed to protect it from the desacralization that would result from a democratic literal simplicity, a simplicity that would expose it to the comprehension of the many. The O.E.D. gives as an obsolete sense of the word mythologize, 'to expound the symbolism of', and illustrates with a quotation from Swift: 'This parable was immediately mythologized. The whale was interpreted to be Hobbes's Leviathan.' In other words, to mythologize is to allegorize. But I would like to reverse the signification and suggest that some allegorizing is 'mythologizing', that is, raising to the status of 'myth' in the second sense just noted.

When the reconciling function of allegorization extends beyond the limits of a particular culture, and brings another or more cultures within its range, we have syncretism. Syncretism, in fact, has been a marked feature of the allegorical schools, especially the Neoplatonists and the Gnostics. It is easy to see why they should adopt allegorical interpretations. An obvious way of reducing the multiplicity of deities and heroes, each on the surface so different from the others, is to consider them as allegorical variations on a single theme, the one 'timeless' single theme. It is thus, for example, that Plotinus is able to bring together the myths of Narcissus and of Odysseus. The one truth that both exemplify is the need to free oneself from 'the life of flux and sensible appearances' -- 'the stream of Pleasure and the Flesh'. Narcissus fails to do so, while Odysseus succeeds. Similar interpretations of these myths are given by the Renaissance Neoplatonist, Ficino.[15]

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[15] J. A. Stewart, p. 223.

The attempt to syncretize mythologies continued through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into the early years of the nineteenth. In a book called Shores of Darkness, Edward B. Hungerford has given an entertaining account of the mythographers of the period who attempted, like George Eliot's Casaubon, to provide a key to all mythology, people like Samuel Bochart, Jacob Bryant, Jean Sylvan Bailly, Pierre Hancarville (or d'Ancarville), and Francis Wilford. They all relied on dubious etymologies, among other evidence, to prove their particular hunches. Euhemerism was a marked tendency in this mythography. Francis Wilford, for example, was convinced, though only for a time, that he had discovered the secret of the lost Atlantis; it was none other than Albion itself, the selfsame Albion or England which the Hindus referred to in their myths as the Sweta Dwipa or 'White Island'. Blake, who had read widely in this literature, remarks: 'The antiquities of every Nation under Heaven, is no less sacred than that of the Jews. They are the same thing, as Jacob Bryant and all antiquaries have proved.'[16]

Max Müller's 'solar mythology' is in the tradition of the speculative mythology mentioned above, though with the development of Indo-Germanic philology the wild speculations of the former are replaced by a more scientific comparison of words and roots. Max Müller insists on the allegorical nature of myths, criticizing Grote for taking Greek myths purely literally. He observes that two of the common ingredients of ancient languages are what he terms 'Polyonymy' and 'Synonymy', that is, a plurality of names for a single object and a single name for a plurality of objects, and also that primitive speech is essentially metaphorical. On the basis of these he goes on to interpret nearly all myths, Greek, Indian, and others, as dealing with the one theme of the rise and fall of the sun. As an illustration, we can consider his interpretation of the myth of Kephalos and Prokris. He first reduces the myth into its 'constituent elements' thus:

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[16] Quoted by Hungerford, p. 57.

1. Kephalos loves Prokris
2. Eos loves Kephalos
3. Prokris is faithless, yet her lover is still Kephalos in disguise
4. Prokris is accidentally killed by Kephalos

Kephalos is taken to represent the 'head'of the sun, that is, the rising sun, since in Greek it is the word for head. Prokris is interpreted as the dew, the etymology of the name being traced to the Sanskrit for rain-drops. Eos is the dawn. The whole myth is thus a natural allegory of the sun, who is loved by both the dawn and the morning dew; the third constituent element listed above refers to the 'rays of the sun being reflected in various colours from the dewdrops'. The accidental killing of Prokris is, of course, a reference to the final absorption of the dew. At the end of the myth, Kephalos throws himself into the sea, and this obviously refers to the setting of the sun. Max Müller is similarly able to show that Hercules also is a sun-god, and the poisoned coat given to him by Deianeira is really a metaphor for the clouds which engulf the sun at sunset. The whole of mythology, in fact, stems from a gigantic pathetic fallacy:

> There is much suffering in nature to those who have eyes for silent grief, and it is this tragedy -- the tragedy of nature -- which is the lifespring of all the tragedies of the ancient world. The idea of a young hero, whether he is called Baldr, or Sigurd, or Sifrit, or Achilles, or Meleager, or Kephalos, dying in the fulness of youth, a story so frequently told, localised, and individualised, was first suggested by the Sun, dying in all his youthful vigour either at the end of a day, conquered by the powers of darkness, or at the end of the sunny season, stung by the thorn of winter.[17]

This looks back to the interpretation of myths as allegories of natural phenomena that began in early antiquity, and looks forward to Sir James Frazer and the 'Cambridge' anthropologists, because Frazer's prototypical Vegetation Spirit and the Dying God, and Jane Harrison's

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[17] F. Max Müller, Chips from a German Workshop, Vol. II, 69-73, 87-91, 110.

Eniautos-daimon are basically similar figures. There is in them, as in Max Müller, a reduction of the multiplicity of gods to a single god whose life history is an allegory of the progress of the year, of the sowing and harvesting of corn, of winter and spring, death and rebirth.[18] However, in assimilating Christ to this prototypical dying god, Frazer and others show an advance over Max Müller, who does not seem to have noticed the rather obvious relation of Christ to sun-gods, a relation to which the pun in the word 'son' draws attention. This pun has, of course, been frequently exploited in religious poetry, as, for example, in Donne's 'Good Friday - 1613, Riding Westward'.

Carl Jung, in a sense, takes Max Müller as his point of departure. Accepting the latter's 'monomyth' of the solar hero, Jung goes a step further and allegorizes the solar hero as a projection of the libido. Thus, in his writings on myth the relation between syncretism (which in turn is related to typology) and allegory is clearly brought out. Jung postulates a libido which, he maintains in opposition to Freud, is not to be equated with sexuality or desire, since it is in itself just a potentiality, a 'psychic energy'. The concept of libido as desire is, according to Jung, an interpretation of it. What the libido is, per se, we cannot know; we can at best symbolize it in various forms. There are three fundamental modes of symbolizing the libido:

1. Comparison by analogy: as sun and fire
2. Causative comparison: (a) with objects. The libido is characterized by its object, e.g. the health-giving sun. (b) with the subject. The libido is characterized by its instrument or something analogous to it, e.g. the phallus or its analogue, the snake.

Jung adds that these possibilities of comparison represent 'so many

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[18] For a discussion of the theories of Frazer and Jane Harrison, see Chapter 2.

possible ways of symbolization, and for this reason all the infinitely varied symbols, so far as they are libido-images, can be reduced to a common denominator -- the libido and its properties.'[19]

Jung goes on in the same passage to suggest a parallel between this simplification and 'the historical attempts of civilization to unify and simplify, in a higher synthesis, the infinite number of gods'. The attempt of Amenophis IV to replace all the gods of Egypt by 'the great living disc of the sun', as well as similar attempts in the case of Greek and Roman polytheism (Jung also refers with approval to the syncretism of Mutianus Rufus which I have mentioned earlier), were psychologically valuable, since the reduction of the many gods to one merely reflected the fact that these deities were but different symbols for the psychic forces.[20]

In considering nature gods as projections of the unconscious, Jung is in direct line of descent from the Neoplatonic and Gnostic idea of man as a microcosm. Jung is, of course, a leading researcher in alchemy and Gnostic philosophy. He maintains that in myths and rituals, as well as in literature, physical objects (e.g. the sun, the moon, the earth, bread, wine) are often symbolic at two levels, the objective and the subjective, since they have an objective as well as a subjective or psychic origin. Subjectively they are projections of the personality which, in so far as it is unconscious, is indistinguishable from the object on to which it is projected. Jung invokes Lévy-Bruhl to clarify this idea:

> in other words, the unconscious personality merges with our environment in accordance with the . . . participation mystique. This fact is of the greatest practical importance because it renders intelligible the peculiar symbols through which this projected entity expresses itself in dreams. By this I mean the symbols of the outside world and the cosmic

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[19] Collected Works, Vol. 5, pp. 97, 132-141.

[20] Ibid., pp. 97-99. The reference to Rufus is in a footnote to p. 99.

> symbols. These form the psychological basis for the conception of man as a microcosm, whose fate, as we know, is bound up with the macrocosm through the astrological components of his character.[21]

With the help of this concept of the participation mystique Jung is able to interpret the Christian Mass as a symbol of self-sacrifice: through the identification of the subject with the object in the participation mystique, the bread and wine of the Mass become the participant himself, and hence the Mass becomes a symbol of the self-sacrifice that must precede psychic rebirth.[22] Such interpretation, since it considers physical objects as representing inner psychic realities, is in the tradition of moral and spiritual allegorizing that we have been discussing. Thus we can say that in his writings on mythology at least Jung undoubtedly belongs to the allegorical tradition.

Jung's concept of archetypes also leads to allegory, as I shall presently show. The idea of the 'collective unconscious' and of archetypes has been the subject of much controversy, into which it is beyond the scope of this essay to go. It may be pointed out, however, that Jung has repeatedly emphasized that he does not intend to imply that the contents of images can be inherited. What is inherited in 'the anatomical structure of the brain' is rather a 'potentiality', a form.[23] As examples of archetypal forms he gives the following: 'chaotic multiplicity and order; duality; the opposition of light and dark, upper and lower, right and left; the union of opposites in a third; the quaternity (square, cross); rotation (circle, sphere); and finally the centring process and a radial arrangement.[24] In thus reducing the immense

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[21] Collected Works, Vol. 11, p. 259.

[22] See the section on 'sacrifice' in 'The Transformational Symbolism of the Mass' in Vol. 11, pp. 254-273; see also Vol. 5, Part II, Ch. VIII.

[23] Vol. 15, pp. 80-1.

[24] Vol. 8, p. 203.

variety of images and motifs taken from myths and 'visionary' literature, as well as from dreams, to a few basic structures, Jung would seem to be anticipating Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis of myths in which they are reduced to a number of binary opposites which in turn are supposed to reflect the binary structure of the human mind itself.[25] However, the similarity between Lévi-Strauss's constraining structures of the mind that determine even the making of myths (which are apparently the freest of all human activities) and Jung's 'inborn possibilities of ideas that set bounds to even the boldest fantasy and keep our fantasy activity within certain categories'[26] is only superficial. For Jung's 'ideas' and 'forms' are transcendental realities, existing in the collective unconscious as in the Platonic world of ideas, whereas Lévi-Strauss's structures are only the structures of the human brain.

This last remark needs elaboration. Jung's concept of the archetype really belongs to the Neoplatonic and Gnostic tradition. He uses the term in precisely the same sense in which Philo uses it, and to which I have already referred. For Jung, as for Philo, the archetype in itself is unknowable. He therefore makes a distinction between the archetype as such and the archetypal or primordial images, the latter bearing the same relation to the archetype as 'type' does to 'archetype' in Philo's terminology:

> They [the archetypal images] are very varied structures which all point back to one essentially "irrespresentable" basic form. The latter is characterized by certain formal elements and by certain fundamental meanings, although these can be grasped only approximately. The archetype as such is a psychoid factor that belongs, as it were, to the invisible ultraviolet end of the psychic spectrum. It does not appear, in itself, to be capable of reaching consciousness. I venture this hypothesis because everything archetypal which is perceived by consciousness seems to represent a set of

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[25] For Lévi-Strauss's strictures on Jung see The Savage Mind, p. 65; see also his interview with George Steiner in Encounter, 26, No. 4 (April 1966), 32-38 (p. 35).

[26] Collected Works, Vol. 15, p. 81.

variations on a ground theme.

The relation between the archetype per se and the archetypal images is thus a relation of the One to the Many, the many images being variations on the one 'irrepresentable' theme. Jung compares this to the situation in physics where the smallest particles are themselves irrepresentable, but have effects on the basis of which a model of the particle can be built up. 'The archetypal image, the motif or mythologem is a construction of this king.' Further, Jung argues that where two or more irrepresentables are assumed to exist, there is no logical argument against the hypothesis that they are really identical -- the one timeless reality, in short.[27]

Jung's interpretation of myths, literature, and dreams thus consists in reducing the multiplicity of images and motifs to a few basic 'forms' which point to a timeless psychic-spiritual reality. The reduction of the many gods of mythology to one god, and of the many archetypal images to one archetype, can both be considered as modes of typological thinking. Allegory enters in the attempt to explain the significance of the archetype -- this inexplicable psychic reality which is mirrored forth in physical objects as 'through a glass darkly'. The principle of man as a microcosm is the most useful principle for such allegorical interpretations, and has always been central in Jung's philosophy.

Freud's interpretation of myths and rituals as well as dreams has also been described as allegorical. Kenneth Burke argues that 'any sense in which one order is interpreted as the sign of another' would be the modern equivalent of the allegorical level of the fourfold medieval system of interpretation, and as examples he suggests the psychoanalytic interpretation of Venus in Venus and Adonis as mother; or a 'flat equating of Venus, Adonis, and the boar with three different social classes'. It is in this sense that Northrop Frye considers all

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[27] Vol. 8, pp. 213-14.

commentaries that seek to relate a work of art to moral, social, or philosophical concerns as allegorizations. Angus Fletcher also considers many psychoanalytical interpretations of a work as allegorical.[28] Freud himself distinguishes psychoanalytical analysis from allegorizing thus:

> in the scene of sacrifice before the god of the clan the father is in fact represented twice over -- as the god and as the totemic animal victim. But in our attempts at understanding this situation we must beware of interpretations which seek to translate it in a two-dimensional fashion as though it were an allegory, and which in so doing forget its historical stratification. The two-fold presence of the father corresponds to the two chronologically successive meanings of the scene.[29]

Psychological interpretation thus differs from the allegorical in that it attempts a causal explanation of symbols, in the history of a tribe in the case of primitive myths and rituals, totems and taboos, and in the history of an individual in the case of dreams and neuroses.

Wittgenstein, however, pointed out that Freud's interpretations were closer to literary interpretations than to scientific explanations since they could never be verified but only justified with greater or less convincingness.[30] At any rate, whether scientific or not, Freud's explanations are allegorical at least in the sense that they proceed from the basic assumption that myths and dreams are modes of 'other speaking', that is, allegory in its original sense. At the same time, it must be admitted that the effect of Freudian interpretation has been to demythologize myth. In the traditional view of myth and allegory that we have traced, 'other speaking' was considered necessary

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[28] Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 220; Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 89; Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode, p. 14.

[29] See Totem and Taboo in The Standard Edition, Vol. XIII, p. 149.

[30] For Wittgenstein's discussion of Freud, see Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, edited by Cyril Barrett (Oxford, 1966).

because that was the only way in which truths otherwise inexpressible could be expressed, or because it was like a sacred veil which protected truth from desacralization by creating difficulties for the understanding. For Freud, however, the veil of allegory hides something not sacred but rather sordid and taboo; it is a subterfuge to elude the super-ego rather than the comprehension of the profane or the uninitiated. For the mythologists, including Jung, myth was something positive, shadowing forth some profound truth, either about the external world or the internal; for Freud, 'myth' has become entirely neutral. Nevertheless, in actual practice Freud does attach a great deal of importance to myths, fairy-tales, and folk-tales, because they seem to him to represent the 'natural language' of the unconscious.

Theories about the nature of myths or scriptures can easily be extended to literature, and have been. Certainly, it is easy to see how the view of myths as allegories embodying profound truths can have literary application. Once the term <u>myth</u> has ceased to signify a story about gods which is believed to be true, and begun to imply a 'fiction' expressing a universal truth, it has become synonymous with 'great art' or 'great literature'. Perhaps it would be even more appropriate to call myth 'literature' than vice versa. As it is, however, the idea of art-as-myth-as-allegory is widely implicit in contemporary criticism. The intermediate step was the application of the term 'myth' to the Bible, which can be traced to the nineteenth century. Greek myths, when no longer literally believed in, or when found clashing with contemporary ideals, were allegorized; the Bible, when no longer considered historically authentic, was mythologized; similarly, literature that has acquired the status of a classic but which can no longer be taken as realistic narrative is promptly dubbed as 'myth'. In many ways the vogue for the term in modern criticism can be related to the reaction against naturalism that set in towards the end of the last century.

Colin Still, who wrote an influential study on <u>The Tempest</u> in

1921 belongs more completely to the allegorizing tradition of mythologists than perhaps any other literary critic. Art, for Still, is a mirror to reality: external and internal. Lesser art is concerned with the reflection of mere external reality, but it is the quality of great art to reflect internal reality, as 'through a glass darkly'. This internal reality can be of two kinds: (a) realities peculiar to the individual consciousness, and (b) realities existing in the 'universal consciousness' (a kind of Anima Mundi, or 'collective unconscious'). This reality is not on the surface of the work of art and has to be discovered through interpretation. The critic must be a 'reader of riddles', a priest or hierophant, in fact, ceremoniously initiating the reader into the mysteries of the work.[31]

Still then goes on to formulate a system of 'universal imagery' the basis of which is in the 'permanent facts of mankind's material existence', and the relevance of which is to the 'permanent facts of his inner experience'. The origin of this system of 'universal imagery' goes back to the ancient concept of man as a microcosm. This imagery consists of the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire (ether), and the three transitional substances, mire, mist, and the rainbow. Their significance is twofold: they are symbolic of what Still (following Bergson) calls 'planes of consciousness', as well as of 'mythical regions'. Fire, for example, corresponds to paradise in the mythical realm and to 'redemption' on the plane of consciousness.[32]

In myth, according to Colin Still, this system of natural imagery is most conspicuous. Still does not make an absolute distinction between myth and great art. Genuine myth, in his view, 'is a living tree growing slowly out of the seed which was sown by the genius of some poet or mystic of old, and which has been quickened and developed by the collective imagination of countless generations of men and women'. If a work of

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[31] Colin Still, The Timeless Theme, pp. 4-6.

[32] Ibid., Chapters 2 and 3, esp. pp. 21-3, 33.

art by an individual genius contains the seed of inspiration it will go on living 'and will achieve a larger life than its original creator could give it'. It will, in short, eventually become myth. And the sum of all such myths and mysteries 'forms the main substance of a universal tradition which is a living organism'. Still writes (and the sentiment here, if not the actual words, brings to mind the writings of Northrop Frye which, of course, come later):

> THIS UNIVERSAL TRADITION IS THE LIVING ART OF ALL HUMANITY. It is a perfected reflection of the entire sum of man's spiritual wisdom and experience. It is THE WORD MADE FLESH, begotten by the universal spirit, as by the archangel Gabriel, through the soul of all mankind, as through the Virgin Mary Herself.

The common theme of the Universal or 'Organic Tradition' is the cycle of the Fall and Ascent, and it is this theme (the 'Timeless Theme' of the title of the book) which is the 'Absolute Standard' by which individual works of art should be judged. Still applies this theory to The Tempest and comes to the conclusion that it is a play dealing with initiation and redemption, as indeed are all great works of art, as well as all myths and the rituals of the mystery cults.[33]

For Still, then, great art is mythical, and myth is the embodiment of a timeless reality; rather all myths are embodiments of the same reality. For G. Wilson Knight, too, great art is mythical, as is religion. In myth, as in poetry and religion, 'fact and value are reintegrated, and an immediate unfalsified reality created'. The reintegration of fact and value is parallel to the reintegration of past and future into eternity.[34] It is in this sense that Shakespeare's last plays are 'myths of immortality'.[35] Knight discerns three orders of facts:

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[33] Ibid., pp. 62 ff., 121, 135.

[34] The Christian Renaissance, pp. 70-71.

[35] See the essay 'Myth and Miracle', reprinted in The Crown of Life.

1. Imaginatively true but factually insignificant or false
2. Factually true but imaginatively insignificant
3. Factually as well as imaginatively true [36]

The facts of the life of Jesus are of this last order, so that his life itself becomes symbolic. However, in detailing these three orders of facts, Knight is really providing a rationale for allegorical interpretations of literature as well as the Bible. His views on the different kinds of facts go back in their origin to Origen's theory of biblical interpretation. In the Eleventh Homily on Numbers, Origen writes:

> We have shown I think, with the authority of Holy Scripture, that some of the things which are written in the Law are certainly to be cautiously avoided, lest they should be literally observed by students of the Gospel, but that other things are at all costs to be retained as written. In the case of certain other passages, it is useful and necessary for us to accept them in an allegorical sense, in addition to accepting their literal truth. [37]

This certainly gives the interpreter all the 'liberty of interpreting' that he could ask for.

For Knight, then, a work of art, like the Bible itself, could be taken both literally as well as a myth, that is, allegorically. What the myth expresses is a mystery that can never be grasped intellectually, the mystery of immortality or eternity, for example. Other writers have used myth in the sense of a story expressing truths beyond the grasp of the intellect. Thus, D.G. James defines the purpose of myth as 'the showing forth of that which cannot be set out by the representation of a merely human situation; its function is the conveyance, to whatever degree possible, of the divine as well as the human'. More recently, Richmond Y. Hathorn has defined myth as 'a tissue of symbolism clothing a mystery'. [38] In his view, myth is literature, though all literature is not myth.

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[36] The Christian Renaissance, p. 76.

[37] Quoted in Lampe, p. 58.

[38] D. G. James, Scepticism and Poetry, p. 213; Richmond Y. Hathorn, Tragedy, Myth, and Mystery, p. 25.

This view of myth perhaps goes back to Plato, whose own myths are designed precisely for this purpose of apprehending a transcendental reality. Insofar as the myth is held to be a pointer to a mystery, it is closer to what is normally called a symbol than to allegory. J. A. Stewart therefore argues that the myths of Plato are symbolic rather than allegorical.[39] If by allegory is meant a work in which, as Northrop Frye puts it, 'a poet explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and precepts, and so tries to indicate how a commentary on him should proceed',[40] then, of course, myths are not allegories, and neither is 'mythical' literature allegorical. But we are concerned in this essay with allegorization rather than with allegory itself, and as Kenneth Burke and Northrop Frye have argued, we get allegorical commentary whenever the critic tries to relate the images in the work to 'examples and precepts', even when the writer himself has not explicitly indicated any such relationship. In the passage just cited, Frye suggests that one of the reasons for the widely prevalent dislike of formal allegory is that it 'prescribes the direction of his [the critic's] commentary, and so restricts its freedom'. Explicit allegory, in other words, invites the least amount of allegorization; and it is precisely the fact that myth, whether classical biblical, or individual and literary, has invited the greatest amount of allegorization that can explain the usual distinction between myth or symbol and allegory.

Myth invites allegorization. But at the same time allegorization, as I have hinted earlier helps to preserve the mythical status of myth. Edwin Honig argues that there is a resemblance between the 'endowed quality of mystery in myth and the allegorical quality derived from a text'. Both represent the mana in the object. He continues:

The priest endows the object with mana and the communicant

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[39] J. A. Stewart, pp. 44-54.

[40] Anatomy of Criticism, p. 90.

apprehends its existence there. The object with mana, like the religious allegory, becomes an instrument of faith, something to worship, an artifact. If, as in Christianity, for example, a single god has created the text as well as the world, the text is the means of apprehending the presence of divinity in nature; there is "the good book" and there is "the book of nature" which it interprets. So, too, one might say of creations in art that they take on the quality of mana by lending themselves to many varieties of interpretation. There is also an obvious parallelism between object and mana, text and allegory, myth and mystery: in each case the original creation invites, is followed by, and frequently is wholly consumed by a variety of interpretative re-creations.[41]

That last clause could almost be a description of the fate of Shakespeare. His works certainly have taken on this quality of mana and thus become myths. However, Honig's position needs some qualification. Not all allegorization of a text corresponds to the mana in an object; Freudian allegorization, as I have already argued, would seem to belong to what Frye calls the ironic mode, which is at the other pole from the mythical. The intention of his exegesis is not to endow the object with mana or mystery, but rather to divest it of it, though fortunately he does not always succeed. The kind of historical allegorization by which a character in a play or novel is related to a contemporary figure is also, obviously, not a mythologizing kind of allegorical commentary.

Allegorical commentary that can properly be described as myth-criticism is characterized by two elements: a conviction that the truth that the work is allegorically presenting is of a higher, spiritual order, and a marked tendency toward syncretism or reductionism. Both have been conspicuous in the allegorical theory of myths from very early times, though in modern criticism the former element has been complicated by the insistence that this truth is not only of a higher order, but also inexpressible in any other way. But this need not be a position in conflict with the allegorical theory, since allegory too was considered to be the only way in which sacred truth could be revealed.

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[41] Dark Conceit, pp. 22-3.

Syncretism in literary criticism is an obvious development from the similar trend in theories about myth and Scripture. I have shown how typological exegesis led from finding anticipations or 'types' of Christ in the Old Testament to similar 'types' in classical myths. When G. Wilson Knight says that each of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is 'a miniature Christ', or when Northrop Frye reads the four 'Romances' as plays which have Orpheus as their hero, they are doing a sort of typological analysis.[42] Such analysis always involves allegorization. The urge toward perfection leads such typological analysis to a synthesis of the many figures of literature, as of myths, into one, and this one figure is considered to be a symbolization of the one timeless theme. Colin Still describes this theme as the theme of Redemption; Jung's 'individuation process' is a similar theme; in Frye, the theme is 'loss and regaining of identity', and in almost every other critic it is some aspect of the theme of the birth, rise to fame, death, and rebirth of the archetypal hero, a pattern of events which parallels the processes of nature as well as the progress of the psyche.

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[42]G. Wilson Knight, Shakespearian Production, p. 157; Northrop Frye, A Natural Perspective, p. 147.

CHAPTER 2

MYTH, RITUAL, AND DRAMA

The ritual theory of myth has been the most influential in modern literary criticism, though in its actual application it is often indistinguishable from the allegorical theory as I have described it in Chapter 1. According to Stanley Edgar Hyman, one of the most enthusiastic champions of this theory among literary critics, it goes back ultimately to Heraclitus.[1] This derivation does not, however, seem to be intended to be taken too literally. More directly the theory goes back to Robertson Smith who argued the primacy of ritual over myth.[2] But it was through the writings of Sir James Frazer and Jane Harrison that the theory gained wide currency, and the more specifically literary applications were made by Gilbert Murray to Greek Tragedy, by F.M. Cornford to Greek Comedy, and by Jessie Weston to the Arthurian romances. Sir E.K. Chambers and R.J.E. Tiddy studied primitive ritual patterns in English folk-drama, and Gilbert Murray and Janet Spens applied the theory to Shakespeare. Most of these works appeared in the first two decades of the present century. Bearing this in mind, as also the fact that The Golden Bough had considerable influence on the creative work of writers like Eliot, Yeats, and Lawrence,[3] we can

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[1] 'The Ritual View of Myth and the Mythic', p. 132.

[2] The Religion of the Semites, p. 18.

[3] For an account of the influence of The Golden Bough on modern poetry see John B. Vickery, 'The Golden Bough and Modern Poetry'. Mr. Vickery is primarily concerned with tracing the influence of the work on Lawrence, Yeats, and Edith Sitwell, but it is surprising that

safely say that the importance of the theories of Frazer and others, in particular the derivation of myths and works of art from ancient rituals and the interpretation of these rituals as variants or different aspects of an 'ur-ritual' celebrating the death and rebirth of a god, was firmly established in literary criticism by the 1920s.

Frazer's contribution to anthropological theory has been questioned by anthropologists from the very beginning[4] and he does not make any direct contribution to aesthetic theory either. But insofar as he popularized the idea of the divine king as sacrificial victim and scapegoat his contribution to literary theory and practice has been seminal. Very briefly, the relevant part of Frazer's theory is as follows. In primitive societies it was a widespread custom to kill the divine king (who must be considered as one of later forms of an original 'Vegetation Spirit') in order that his power may not be weakened by the inroads of age. In later times an animal or human substitute was killed instead of the king himself. There was another widespread ritual in which evils and sins were sought to be expelled by being transferred on to a human victim who was then killed or expelled. It occurred to people later, according to Frazer's rather casual historical hypothesis, to combine these two rituals. Since the divine king (or his representative) had to be killed, it was economical to make him the scapegoat also. In the case of the divine scapegoat, therefore, two rituals which were originally separate were combined.[5] Whatever the intrinsic merits of this hypothesis and of the central point of Frazer's theory, namely, the

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he mentions T.S. Eliot only in passing. The influence of The Golden Bough on The Waste Land is obvious. See also Chapter 4 below for a brief discussion of Eliot's contribution to the myth and ritual approach.

[4] See Edmund R. Leach, 'Frazer and Malinowski', Encounter, 25, No. 5 (November 1965), 24-36.

[5] The Golden Bough, pp. 576-7.

in terms of this ritual regicide (and to me they seem rather dubious), in their actual application to the plays of Shakespeare the ideas of divine sacrifice and the scapegoat tend to be used without sufficient regard for the very different feel of the different, though related, rituals that are involved. This is a point I shall take up in greater detail in the course of discussion of the actual criticism in Chapter 7, where I shall also indicate some other sources of dissatisfaction with the concept of the scapegoat as it is often used by literary critics.

Discussion of the theoretical implications of anthropology for art and literature is to be found not in the writings of Frazer but in those of Jane Harrison. According to her ritual is prior to myth, myth being 'the spoken correlative of the acted rite, the thing done'. A ritual is 'a collective representation' of the needs and desires of life. The Greek word for ritual, dromenon, is related to the word drama, both implying something done or acted. But ritual is rather something either 're-done' or 'pre-done', in other words 're-presented', and this representation, or imitation, springs from unfulfilled desire, which is the source of art and religion alike.[6] Ritual is thus the first stage in the symbolic reconstruction of reality, but it is still tied to practical ends. It is thus 'a frequent and perhaps universal transition stage between actual life and that peculiar contemplation of or emotion towards life which we call art'. The transition from ritual to art is described as follows:

> By the long discipline of ritual man accustomed himself to slacken his hold on action, and be content with a shadowy counterfeit practice. Then last, when through knowledge he was relieved from the need of immediate reaction to imminent realities, he loosed hold for a moment altogether, and was free to look, and art was born.

Using a concept formulated by Edward Bullough she sums up the difference between dromenon and drama as one of 'Psychical Distance'.[7]

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[6] Themis, pp. 42-45, 328.

[7] Ancient Art and Ritual, pp. 129, 206, 222.

At the same time Jane Harrison also insists upon the necessity of identification for drama. She observes that primitive religions usually have dromena but that drama sprang only from the religion of Dionysos. The cults of Athene, Zeus, and Poseidon in Ancient Greece had dromena but no drama. She offers the following explanation for this :

> Surely it is at least possible that the real impulse to the drama lay not wholly in 'goat-songs' and 'circular dancing places' but also in the cardinal, the essentially dramatic, conviction of the religion of Dionysos, that the worshipper can not only worship, but can become, can be his god. . . . It is indeed only in the orgiastic religions that these splendid moments of conviction could come, and, for Greece at least, only in an orgiastic religion did the drama take its rise.[8]

The apparent inconsistency between identification and psychical distance could perhaps be merely a reflection of the paradoxical nature of drama and of art generally.

In Themis Jane Harrison discusses the development of Attic drama from the dromena of an Eniautos-daimon, of whom Dionysos is considered to be merely one manifestation. The rituals related to this daimon gave rise to myths which usually followed the pattern of a contest, a pathos formally announced by a messenger and followed by a lamentation (threnos), and a final triumphant epiphany. This was also the pattern of the things done and the myth could therefore be described as 'the plot of the dromenon' or, as Aristotle defined it, 'the arrangement of the incidents'. But Jane Harrison also suggests that myth is not merely the thing spoken at ritual but a 're-utterance or pre-utterance'. 'It is a focus of emotion, and uttered . . . collectively or at least with collective sanction.' Because of this collective sanction and solemn purpose 'a myth becomes practically a story of magical intent and potency'. As such it could be considered to be parallel to ritual rather than merely derived from it. But at the same time one should also remember that myth has its magical potency only when

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[8] Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, p. 568.

associated with ritual and uttered collectively or with collective sanction. Once myths cut themselves loose from rituals, they lose their religious value on the one hand, but become the raw material for drama on the other. Drama, according to Jane Harrison, required more flexible material than myths tied to rituals. She writes:

> The mythos, the plot which is the life-history of an Eniautos-daimon, whether performed in winter, spring, summer or autumn, is thus doomed by its monotony to sterility. What is wanted is material cast in a less rigid mould; in a word legomena not bound by dromena, plots that have cut themselves loose from rites. The dithyramb, which was but the periodic festival of the spring renouveau, broke and blossomed so swiftly into the Attic drama because it found such plots ready to hand; in a word--the forms of Attic drama are the forms of the life-history of an Eniautos-daimon; the content is the infinite variety of free and individualized heroic saga--in the largest sense of the word 'Homer'.[9]

To summarize: both myth and drama arise from ritual; ritual provides drama with its form; the content is provided by myths that have cut themselves loose from rites and have consequently been diversified. These diverse myths, arising from the same ritual of the Eniautos-daimon and consequently having the same basic structure, have formed the substance of Attic drama. Gilbert Murray and F. M. Cornford try to show that both tragedy and comedy arise from the seasonal rituals of renewal, each genre representing a particular phase in the life of the Year-daimon: comedy celebrating his marriage and the subsequent feast and tragedy representing his death and its lamentation.[10] Both Murray and Cornford support their arguments with analogies between the ancient ritual and such folk survivals as the English mummers' plays and similar folk drama found in Northern Greece and in other parts of Europe. This aspect of their work is chiefly interesting because it suggests possible intermediaries through which the ancient ritual pattern could have got into the plays of Shakespeare.

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[9] Themis, pp. 330-34. I have transliterated some words which appear in Greek in the original passages.

[10] Ibid., p. 341.

Theodor Gaster puts forward a different formulation of the basic pattern of primitive rituals. He is basically in agreement with the 'Cambridge school' of anthropologists in that he also maintains that drama has evolved from seasonal rituals. For primitive communities, he argues, life is not a continuity but 'a series of leases annually or periodically renewed'. The seasonal rites are a concerted programme of action to secure this lease. Gaster divides them into two main groups which he names 'Rites of Kenosis, or Emptying' and 'Rites of Plerosis, or Filling'. Each of these categories of rites is further subdivided into two types, thus making a total of four types, or rather phases, of rites: rites of Mortification, rites of Purgation, rites of Invigoration, and rites of Jubilation. The rites by themselves are what Gaster terms 'real' and 'punctual', that is, they do not refer to anything beyond themselves. Myth, according to Gaster, is neither the outgrowth of ritual (Robertson Smith) nor the spoken correlative of the thing done (Jane Harrison), but rather 'the expression of a parallel aspect of the seasonal pattern'. It has the function of 'projecting the procedures of ritual to the plane of ideal situations which they are then taken to substantize and reproduce'.[11] By doing so it transmutes ritual into drama. Samuel Selden has similarly argued that drama is the product of a 'marriage of myth and ritual'.[12] Philip Wheelwright has tried to relate Gaster's four phases of the seasonal ritual to the three phases of Arnold van Gennep's rites de passage, namely, rites of separation, rites of the margin -- when the celebrant is in the darkness between two worlds -- and rites of attainment. He suggests that this rather than the pattern of death and rebirth is the 'most general character of the primitive ritual'.[13] Anthropologists have also tended to consider van Gennep's formulation as the more satisfactory general description of primitive rituals.[14]

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[11] Thespis, pp. 4-7. [12] Man in his Theater, p. 22

[13] 'Notes on Mythopoeia', pp. 64-5.

[14] See, for example, the article on 'Ritual' by Edmund Leach in The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences.

Charles W. Eckert has analysed ritual elements in stories in the Hamlet-Orestes tradition and come to the conclusion that these can be understood better in terms of initiatory and purgative rituals. His description of the elements of these rituals is closer to van Gennep's formulation of the passage rites than to Frazer's dying god paradigm. I shall describe Eckert's essay in greater detail in the section on Hamlet in Chapter 7.

A recent and interesting variation on the ritual theory of myth and drama is put forward by J.-P. Guépin. In his study of Greek drama, The Tragic Paradox, he stresses a problem which Gilbert Murray and others seem to have ignored, namely, the problem of reconciling the sad ending of so many tragedies with a spring festival in honour of Dionysos, the giver of plenty. What would be expected on such an occasion is a merry celebration, 'a kind of comedy in which evil is vanquished and good triumphs, a connection, perhaps, with such spring rituals as the expulsion of winter and the bringing of summer'. But, according to Mgr. Guépin, to somehow trace something of this in tragedy would be to blur the fundamental distinction between tragedy and comedy. As an alternative he suggests that the origin of the myths which provide the content of Greek tragedy could be the ritual of bloody sacrifice, of which the Bouphonia is an example. Of course the cult of Dionysos may have also involved bloody sacrifice, but it has been the rebirth aspect of the rituals that other writers have generally emphasized. In contrast Mgr. Guépin suggests that the important aspect of these rituals of bloody sacrifice is the paradox that lies at the heart of them, namely, 'the necessary evil of killing and suffering'. Myths are invented to explain or reconcile this paradox and through them the theme enters tragedy. Sacrifice causes a sense of guilt. This is sought to be assuaged through various strategies of evasion. One is to make the victim a criminal, in which case the sacrificer is seen as a hero and the ritual as a yearly or seasonal celebration of his victory. But then the sacred aspect of the victim is lost, and the victim must be sacred if the sacrifice is to be a proper sacrifice and not the mere execution of a criminal. On the other

hand, if the sacrifice itself is considered to be a crime for which the sacrificer must be punished, then the beneficial effect of the sacrifice becomes a matter of doubt. In tragedy these two kinds of excuses may be represented by different points of view within the play. For example, in the Oresteia: according to Clytemnestra,Agamemnon is the guilty sacrificer of the innocent Iphigenia, but according to Orestes, Clytemnestra is the guilty sacrificer of the innocent Agamemnon. Agamemnon's murder is described in terms suggestive of the Bouphonia, in which an agon was held after the sacrifice of a bull to determine the guilt for his 'murder' and the axe or knife which had been used for the slaughter was finally found guilty and cast into the sea. In a similar sacrifice to Dionysos a calf was killed and the priest who killed it was stoned according to law and fled to the sea. Mgr. Guépin points out that both in the Odyssey and in the Agamemnon the hero is described as a bull and his murder as a sacrifice. That a ritual allusion is intended is further suggested by the description of Clytemnestra's action as 'a sacrifice that deserves stoning' and the chorus's statement that for this murder Aegisthus 'shall not escape the people's pelting and curses'.[15]

Mgr. Guépin's thesis is impressively presented through plentiful illustrations from Greek tragedy and it seems to me to do greater justice to the nature of the tragic conflict than the theories of Gilbert Murray and Jane Harrison. He convincingly argues his thesis that the tragic myths are attempts to rationalize the ethical contradictions inherent in sacrifice. This would, of course, be more applicable to Greek tragedy than to Elizabethan, but in some plays of Shakespeare also we can discern, I think, the ritual basis of the ethical conflict. For example, Titus Andronicus, Hamlet, and Macbeth may all be seen as concerned with the purification of a cursed land. For such purification a sacrifice is needed, and Miss H. M. V. Matthews has shown in her book Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays how Shakespeare attempts to resolve an ethical paradox by dissociating the man who kills the usurper from the man who succeeds to the throne.[16]

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[15] The Tragic Paradox, pp. xi-xii, 24-7, 39, 317. [16] p. 171.

But Miss Matthews discusses the paradox in terms of hero myths rather than of sacrificial rituals and therefore I have discussed her criticism in Chapter 6 below. It is nevertheless possible to argue that this ethical paradox has its basis ultimately in sacrificial ritual.

I would like to mention one more theory of sacrifice before going on to discuss a few general aspects of the theory of the ritual origin of drama. Lévi-Strauss has challenged the association of sacrifice with totemism in the works of Robertson Smith and Frazer. Totemism features in Jane Harrison's theory of sacrifice as well. Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, challenges the very reality of totemism as an institution. In any case, he argues, even if one were to grant totemism a semblance of reality, that would only make sacrifice and totemism look more contrasting and incompatible. For in totemism, according to him, 'no other species or natural phenomenon is substitutable for the eponym: one beast can never be taken for another. . . . The opposite is true in the case of sacrifice. Although distinct things are often destined in a preferential manner, for certain deities or certain types of sacrifice, the fundamental principle is that of substitution.' I am not sure that I understand much of Lévi-Strauss and I have mentioned his theory of sacrifice only because Peter S. Anderson has used his ideas on the subject to study the 'language of sacrifice' in Julius Caesar. For the sake of convenience I discuss Mr. Anderson's essay in Chapter 9 along with other criticism applying Lévi-Strauss's ideas to Shakespeare rather than in Chapter 7. The important points in Lévi-Strauss's discussion of sacrifice from our point of view are: that sacrifice intends to establish a relationship of contiguity between two polar terms, the sacrificer and the deity, which are initially separate; that it does so through an intermediary, the sacrificial victim, which is related to both these polar terms metonymically, that is, by virtue of its contiguity to both; and that it is a mode of 'private discourse' and as such the opposite of totemism, which, as a code that aims at making sense, belongs to 'the levels of language'.[17]

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[17] The Savage Mind, pp. 223-8.

It seems to me that what is new here is not the conception of sacrifice, in spite of the different terminology, but the conception of totemism. Lévi-Strauss takes over traditional ideas about magical thought, or at least one aspect of it, in his discussion of sacrifice, but shows how 'totemism' is not magical. If I understand him rightly, his description of sacrifice as a 'private discourse' is meant to indicate the subjective, 'magical', nature of the thought behind it, the kind of thinking which Freud describes as stemming from a belief in the 'omnipotence of thought'.[18]

The ritual theory of myth has been the subject of considerable controversy, but it will not be untrue to say that it has been generally discredited as a single unitary theory to explain the origin of all myths. Clyde Kluckhohn has pointed out that there are instances of societies rich in myths and poor in rituals and vice versa. In any case, the universal relation of myth and ritual is far from proven. Kluckhohn suggests that myths and rituals are related but that that is so because they are both symbolic systems: 'The myth is a system of word symbols, whereas ritual is a system of object and act symbols.'[19] What is really important, therefore, is the interdependence of myth, ritual, and other cultural forms. Joseph Fontenrose has also criticized the theory, especially in its more extreme manifestations in the writings of Hyman and Lord Raglan. The latter, for example, traces the origin of even traditional stories like those of Robin Hood and William Tell to rituals. Fontenrose also questions the interpretation of the rituals as rituals of death and rebirth: even the combat at Nemi which set Frazer on his long search for the Golden Bough might have had nothing to do with the idea that by killing the priest in his prime his vitality may be passed on unimpaired to his successor. Fontenrose suggests that it might

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[18] The phrase is used in Totem and Taboo. See The Standard Edition, Vol. XIII, 85-6.

[19] 'Myths and Rituals : A General Theory', p. 58.

more plausibly have been 'a degraded survival of a succession combat fight for a real divine kingship'.[20] Lévi-Strauss has criticized the view that myths and rituals are 'mutually redundant' homologous forms. He associates this view with Andrew Lang, Malinowski, Durkheim, and Lévi-Bruhl, but his criticism would also apply to Kluckhohn and Gaster as well as to those writers who argue for the priority of ritual over myth. He argues that the homology between ritual and myth does not always exist and that even when there is a homology it is only 'a particular illustration of a more generalized relationship between myth and ritual and among the rites themselves'. He also argues that mechanical causality cannot explain the relation since this relation is dialectical and is 'accessible only if both [i.e. myth and ritual] have been first reduced to their structural elements'.[21] Most recently, G. S. Kirk has come down in favour of a pluralistic approach to the question of the origin and function of myths.[22]

We are, however, concerned primarily with the relation of drama to ritual, and here the theory of ritual origin would seem to have greater validity. It will be remembered that Jane Harrison argues that the form of Attic Drama was derived from the dithyramb, which was but a spring festival of renouveau, while its contents were provided by the Homeric sagas. The validity or invalidity of the further argument that these sagas themselves were merely myths which had cut themselves loose from ritual should not affect the theory in its essence. However, even the derivation of Greek drama from the dithyramb has been questioned, and in any case theories of origin often do not tell us very much, especially as there are no societies that we know of that are without drama. Richard Schechner has therefore dismissed the theory as just

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[20] The Ritual Theory of Myth, p. 49.

[21] Structural Anthropology, pp. 232-3.

[22] See especially the last chapter in his book, Myth.

'brilliant speculative criticism' without any proof.[23] Insofar as the ritual theory of drama is a theory about the origin of drama it may indeed be that. But, as Michael Anderson points out in a comment on Schechner's criticism of the theory, it is more an aesthetic theory than a scientific one, and it is more interesting, in his view, to examine the causes for its popularity. He rightly suggests that the ritual theory has been influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy, in particular by his emphasis on the Dionysiac element in tragedy. Mr. Anderson sees three aspects of Nietzsche's theory of tragedy which are of particular interest from this point of view: first, the view that tragedy expresses not sorrow but ecstatic exultation in the unity of man and nature, so that even the death of the hero-god is a matter for passionate celebration; secondly, the belief in the rebirth of the tragic experience by 'probing into the "Dionysiac recesses" of national myth'; and thirdly, the emphasis on the importance of tragedy, 'not as a literary form but as an existential experience'.[24] The writer who has insisted most upon the ecstatic aspect of tragedy is Yeats. As he writes in 'Lapis Lazuli', both 'Hamlet and Lear are gay / Gaiety transfiguring all that dread'. We should also bear in mind his statement that tragedy is a breaking of the dykes that separate man from man whereas comedy is built upon these dykes.[25] This distinction corresponds to Nietzsche's between the Dionysiac and the Apollonian elements in Greek culture and in life generally. Jane Harrison's emphasis on identification with the god in the cult of Dionysos (and hence with the tragic hero) can also be seen as an aspect of the Nietzschean heritage. Yeats's own plays are Dionysiac in two ways: first, in them the ritual element is emphasized. He wrote as early as 1899 that the theatre began in ritual and must return to it in order to be great again.[26] Secondly, he puts

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[23] 'Approaches to Theory/Criticism', p. 26.

[24] 'Dionysus and the Cultured Policeman', p. 102.

[25] W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London, 1961), p. 241.

[26] Ibid., p. 170.

into practice the idea of reviving tragedy through the Dionysiac recesses of national myth. Perhaps Shakespeare could also be seen as making use of national myths in his history plays to unite his people in a mystic communion. The attempt of G. Wilson Knight, also an ardent Nietzschean, to unite his fellow countrymen during the Second World War through the plays of Shakespeare (in The Olive and the Sword) may be seen in this light as an attempt to make Shakespeare himself into a national myth.

The third aspect of Nietzsche's influence on the ritual theory, namely, the emphasis on tragedy as an existential experience, is related to the decline of dogmatic Christianity. In a world where god is supposed to be dead, drama, according to Mr. Anderson, 'restores the possibility of religious experience', since it is ritual rather than myth or dogma which is the essence of that experience. Mr. Anderson points out that the attitude of the 'Cambridge' anthropologists toward Christianity was ambivalent: they could no longer give assent to the dogmas of the church, but the rituals still held a fascination for them.[27] As the rituals that they found to be the basis of drama were similar in their structure to the central rituals of Christianity, these rituals could, in their dramatic form, be an acceptable substitute for the latter. By concentrating on both drama and religion as existential experiences it was easy to substitute one for the other. I believe that it is this idea, especially insofar as it is the experience of death and rebirth that is thought to have been central to the rituals which formed the basis of tragedy, that has been the most important factor in the popularity of the ritual school. The idea of rebirth is, of course, central to Christianity, but it is equally important in a variety of syncretic occultisms. This aspect of the ritual theory can therefore be seen in the light of the tradition of mythological syncretism which I discussed in the previous chapter. In their interest in, and interpretations of, the ancient mystery cults and the myths associated with them, the anthropologists, occultists, and mythographers often have a lot in common.

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[27] Michael Anderson, p. 103.

So far we have been discussing certain specific patterns of ritual rather than ritual as such. The larger proportion of ritual criticism is concerned with tracing these specific ritual patterns (dying god, seasonal rituals, scapegoat, rites of passage, and so on). Sometimes critics try to argue that these primitive patterns enter Shakespeare's plays through the mediation of folk survivals like the mummers' plays and other Elizabethan forms of festivity. Another mediating element could be the liturgical rites of the medieval church and its development in the mystery cycles. The theory that modern drama began in the medieval church can, of course, stand on its own as an independent 'ritual' theory of the origin of drama having specific application to modern as opposed to ancient drama. Any discussion of the presence of Christian rites in Shakespeare's dramas would also, in the light of this theory, be an instance of ritual criticism. But very often the Christian and the non-Christian ritual theories are combined since the pattern of Christian rituals is so similar to the pattern of the pre-Christian rituals. O. B. Hardison, for example, has slightly modified Gilbert Murray's formulation of the ritual pattern of Greek tragedy (agon, pathos, messenger, threnos, anagnorisis and peripety, and theophany) in the light of medieval religious drama. As he formulates it, the pattern consists of three parts: pathos, peripety, and theophany. He suggests that in Elizabethan, and particularly Shakespearean, drama the continuity of this ritual pattern can be discerned. Because this pattern is 'comic' in terms of its conclusion he suggests that many of Shakespeare's tragedies can be described as 'comic in structure and tragic in tonality'.[28] But Professor Hardison makes these points only as hints for further work.

The concept of ritual enters literary criticism in another way. Instead of discussing specific ritual patterns in the work one could discuss the relation of the work to ritual as such. There are two aspects of this

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[28] Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages, pp. 285, 291.

kind of approach. One could either concentrate on specific 'ritual' elements within the particular work or one could think of the work as a whole as ritual. Ritual in such usage often comes to mean any 'formal' or 'ceremonial' action, but part of the stricter meaning of the term as 'actions in relation to sacred things' (Durkheim) is usually retained. In Tillyard's discussion of the formal elements in Richard II, for example, the ritualistic style of Richard is associated with the medieval sacramental view of the universe. Similarly, in an article entitled 'Document and Ritual', Clifford Leech defines ritual as a ceremony 'conveying homage to a superior being'. As such, ritual, according to Professor Leech, is evident in much of Elizabethan drama. The history plays of Shakespeare and others, for example, 'glorify the spirit of their country'; the tragedies can be seen as acts of 'homage to the greatness . . . of the human spirit' and the comedies, as acts of 'homage to the superhuman force that sports kindly with men's lives'.[29] A. P. Rossiter uses the idea of ritual in this sense to study Richard III and I shall discuss his criticism as well as Tillyard's in Chapter 7.

Richard Schechner suggests that ritual is merely one of the several activities related to the theatre, the others being play, games, and sports. Together these five comprise 'the public performance activities of men'. All these forms of activity are equally primeval, and although there are variations and intermingling of forms there is no long-term evolution from a 'primitive' form to a 'sophisticated' one. Play and ritual, according to Schechner, are the two poles of these performance activities. In play the rules are purely inner and subjective whereas in ritual they are given and objective; play is free and corresponds to the pleasure-principle, but ritual is 'programmed' and corresponds to the reality-principle. The other three activities lie between these two poles. All of them have rules but these are neither entirely inner nor

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[29] Clifford Leech, 'Document and Ritual', p. 286.

entirely outer; rather they are of the nature of a 'frame' within which considerable freedom can be enjoyed. The three groups -- play, games, sports and theatre, and ritual -- thus correspond to egocentric, social, and religious awareness.[30] Of course, each of these activities can intermingle more or less with the others. The ritual and improvisational elements that Francis Fergusson has discerned in Hamlet can be seen, in the light of Schechner's classification, as Shakespeare's attempt to portray the conflict between the inner and the outer, the given and the improvised, with Fergusson's 'improvisation' standing for Schechner's 'play'.[31]

From another point of view, however, ritual and theatre are more closely related. This is from the point of view of the intended or actual function of the two. Ritual is meant to be an efficacious symbolic action, and if the efficaciousness is not conceived too literally theatre too could be seen as a mode of efficacious symbolic action. John Holloway has discussed the ways in which theatre, like myth and ritual, can be 'a source of power, of sustained, renewed or enhanced vitality, in the life of the community or individual'.[32] Similarly, Richard Schechner argues in another essay that 'the ambition to make theater into ritual is nothing other than a wish to make performance efficacious, to use events to change people'.[33]

It has been generally agreed that it is futile to argue the priority of either myth or ritual over the other. As Schechner has argued, the priority of ritual over drama has also not been established. Nevertheless there is a sense in which ritual is prior to myth and drama and it is

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[30] 'Approaches to Theory/Criticism', pp. 26-39.

[31] Fergusson's criticism of Hamlet (in The Idea of a Theater) is discussed in Chapter 7.

[32] The Story of the Night, p. 176.

[33] 'Actuals : A Look into Performance Theory', p. 125.

critically useful to stress this. This is especially so if one wants to emphasize, as Holloway and Schechner do, the importance of looking at drama as a mode of action. For the essence of ritual is action rather than concepts and words, and as action may be thought to be prior to concepts, indeed prior to language itself, and as both drama and myth involve conceptualization, ritual could indeed be said to be prior to them. Ritual here is to be considered as a special case of imitative action in general. The importance of imitation in the process of learning has been known from early times. In recent times Jean Piaget has given a scientific basis to this traditional idea. He has shown how imitation and play both fit into what he terms 'the general framework of the sensory-motor adaptations which characterize the construction of intelligence'. In the beginning imitation is a function of perception itself; the imitative action is not merely 'associated' with perception but is 'inherent in the perceptive schema itself'.[34] Piaget traces in detail the development of imitation through childhood from this initial stage to later symbolic and representational functions. He has offered a convenient summary of his theory of imitation as follows:

> Imitation is the medium by which the child progresses from sensorimotor to representational functions. A form of imitation is already present at the sensorimotor stage. This is a material, or active, representation and takes place only in the presence of the model being imitated. It is non-deferred imitation. . . . It does not imply any form of mental representation, and it does not necessarily result in any. On the other hand, deferred imitation (imitation that starts in the absence of the model) does lead to representation, as is clear in the case of symbolic play. It then becomes internalized as a mental image, which permits the acquisition of language. (Language is based on this deferred imitation, not only on conditioning; otherwise it would develop earlier.)[35]

This makes it clear that not only is imitation prior to language but that

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[34] Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood, pp. 84-5.

[35] See the article on 'Imitation' in The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences.

it is also instrumental in the acquisition of them. Projecting this phylogenetically one could say that imitative action must have preceded speech and concepts, and that ritual as a special class of imitative actions must have preceded religious concepts and myths.[36] In fact it must not only have preceded them but also been directly instrumental in their formation. This is precisely what Jane Harrison argues.

Drama differs from other art forms in that it uses direct imitation. Imitative action can thus be said to be its very essence. The ritual theory of drama may be critically irrelevant insofar as it is concerned merely with the origin of drama; but its concern with origins at least helps to bring out the centrality of imitative action as the arche, the first principle of drama. Drama may also be considered as utilizing a more 'primitive' form of perception than the other arts, a mode of perception that is prior to language and concepts and, insofar as it is the business of art to win back some of the concreteness of perception that is gradually attenuated with the development of abstract thought, a mode to be greatly valued. It is this mode of perception that Francis Fergusson has described by the terms 'the histrionic sensibility' and 'the mimetic perception of action'.[37] One of the most important consequences of the ritual theory of drama is thus the understanding that the essence of drama is not something that can be grasped through a study of its 'meaning' in the study, but something that can only be experienced as an action which we may either participate in or be spectators of. The emphasis on the importance of seeing Shakespeare's drama in its proper setting, in the theatre, that we find in a number of recent critics can certainly be said to owe a great deal to the ritual theory of the 'Cambridge' anthropologists.

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[36] Piaget himself draws attention to similarities between the thought of the child and primitive modes of thought, though he dissociates his theory from any assumption of a 'collective unconscious'. See Play, Dreams and Imitation, pp. 197-8.

[37] The Idea of a Theater, pp. 236-40.

I would finally like to mention some aspects of the critical theory of Kenneth Burke because the idea of ritual is quite central to it. In fact, according to Burke a very wide range of human activities can be seen as ritual or drama. Both these are modes of 'symbolic action', which is described as 'the dancing of an attitude' or as 'the adopting of various strategies for the encompassing of situations'. Burke later substituted the situation-strategy pair by the five terms: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. The relation of these to the previous pair of terms is obvious, since strategy involves an act, an agent, an agency, and a scene or situation. These five terms constitute a 'dramatistic' vocabulary for the discussion of human behaviour. Since primitive ritual is the purest instance of a symbolic action in response to a situation, Burke proposes to take ritual drama as 'the Ur-form, the "hub", with all other aspects of human action treated as spokes radiating from this hub'.[38] In this way he is able to study the ritual or dramatic element in activities as diverse as Hitler's rhetoric and an article by Max Lerner on the constitution of the United States. Though Burke employs a good deal of anthropological concepts, his interest in them is not so much because of the light that anthropology may be thought to cast on the origin of drama but rather because primitive magic offers a simple instance of the symbolic drama that is obscured in more sophisticated cultural forms and comparison with primitive magical rites may therefore serve to bring out the magical elements in the latter. For example, he draws a parallel between the relation of 'scientific' to 'aesthetic' truth and of 'revelation' to 'ritual' as follows:

> Revelation is "scientific" whether its "truth" be founded upon magic, religion, or laboratory experiment. Revelation is "belief" or "fact". Art enters when this revelation is ritualized, when it is converted into a symbolic process. We treat with ceremony a fact considered of importance (if we consider a thing distinguished, we surround it with other things which we consider distinguished: we touch a "pure" object with "clean" hands). Art as eloquence, ceremony,

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[38] Philosophy of Literary Form, pp. 2, 9, 87-90.

> ritual, is nothing other than this principle of consistency, of matching the important with the important. If the artist's "revelations" are of tremendous importance to him, he will necessarily seek to ritualize them, to find a correspondingly important setting for them.[39]

This links up with Burke's idea of the element of rhetoric in art, magic, and other human activities. He suggests (using some ideas of Malinowski) that far from modern rhetoric being an example of primitive word-magic, magic itself could be seen as an example of primitive rhetoric. He writes that magic was merely a mistaken transference of a linguistic function to an area for which it was not fit. 'The realistic use of addressed language to induce action in people became the magical use of addressed language to induce motion in things.'[40] Rhetoric itself is a symbolic action whose purpose is to persuade others rather than merely to encompass a situation. And as an action it too can be studied in the dramatistic perspective.

Thus, through his concept of symbolic action Burke is able to relate things as diverse as ritual, drama, rhetoric, magic, and art and also to bring in sociological and psychological considerations. This is very clearly seen in his extension of the concept of the scape-goat in the light of psychology and sociology. I shall discuss Burke's application of this concept to Shakespeare in Chapter 10. Here I would just like to point out that insofar as Burke's criticism is concerned with symbolic action rather than symbolic action (if one may use his own favourite method of making distinctions) it shares with the ritual theory in general the trend away from a concern with art as 'meaning' to a concern with art as a mode of action and experience. The ritual theory has become associated in common parlance with certain specific ritual patterns, the most popular being the dying god pattern. In the actual criticism of Shakespeare it is the tracing of these specific ritual patterns

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[39] Counter-Statement, p. 168.

[40] Rhetoric of Motives, pp. 40-44.

that has been most popular, as I try to show in Chapter 7. But I believe that the emphasis on drama as a mode of action is a more original and valuable contribution of the ritual theory.

CHAPTER 3

MYTHICAL THOUGHT AND VISION

Myth, in the sense of 'a story about the gods', may be approached from the point of view of the kind of thinking that goes into its making. The nature of this 'mythical' thought is the subject of this chapter. It is from this angle that Ernst Cassirer has approached the subject of myth. As he has also written extensively on it, the larger part of this chapter will be devoted to discussion of his ideas.

According to Cassirer, myth is one of the autonomous 'symbolic forms' through which we perceive reality. In his philosophical orientation Cassirer is a rationalist. For him myth is only one of the ways in which human reality is constructed and his attitude toward it ranges from an appreciation of 'what it can accomplish spiritually'[1] to an emphasis on its dangers when it intrudes into other realms, such as those of science or politics. Other writers, and especially literary critics, have been more enthusiastic about myth, considering it as the only mode of apprehending a 'higher', spiritual reality. But in spite of these differences in attitude toward myth, there is common ground of agreement in that it is accepted as a valid mode of thought, though this validity is not to be thought of in terms of rational criteria. In what follows I give an account of the ideas, first of Cassirer, and then of some other writers, about the nature and 'logic' of mythical thought. Lévi-Strauss is also preoccupied with the nature of this 'mytho-logic',

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[1] The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume II, Mythical Thought, p. xvii.

but I postpone discussion of his ideas till the next chapter. In the second part of this chapter I shall discuss some of the ways in which these ideas about mythical thought are of relevance to literary criticism. (I should point out here that for the purposes of this chapter the terms 'myth' and 'mythical thought' will often be used interchangeably.)

According to Cassirer, the chief characteristic of mythical thought is its concreteness. He argues that mythical thought is incapable of conceiving abstractions as abstractions. Unlike the scientific mode of thought, which proceeds by synthesis and analysis, myth 'lives entirely by the presence of its object -- by the intensity with which it seizes and takes possession of consciousness in a specific moment'. Therefore, myth does not conceal a secret meaning, an 'ideal content'; what we see as 'representation' is a case of 'real identity' for myth. The mythical image does not stand for the 'thing', it is actually identical with it. Mythical thought, as Cassirer puts it, 'lacks the category of the ideal'.[2] Any abstractions must therefore be transformed into a material object or being before it can be grasped by the mythical mind.

The difference between the mythical and the scientific mode of thought can be clearly seen in the concept of causality. Both myth and science have the concept of causality, but whereas scientific causality is concerned with a particular event only as a special instance of a general law, mythical causality is concerned with the 'why' of the particular and the unique in all its particularity and uniqueness. It asks why <u>this</u> particular event took place at this particular place and time and 'explains' it with reference to an 'individual act of the will'. Consequently there is nothing accidental to the mythical mind; it 'begins with the intuition of purposive action', all the forces of nature being conceived of as expressions of a will. Mere contiguity in space or time is sufficient to link objects or events causally. Thus, whereas scientific

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[2] Ibid., p. 38.

thought is concerned with 'change', which it seeks to understand with reference to universal rules, 'mythical thinking knows only a simple metamorphosis' in the Ovidian sense, that is, change from one individual form to another.[3]

Another aspect of the concreteness of mythical perception is the identification of the whole of the object with a part of it. This follows from the fact that in mythical perception there is no analysis of the object into its constitutive parts; the very concept of parts implies analysis, and analysis is alien to this entirely non-abstract mode of perception. In mythical thought the part is not a synecdochic representative of the whole but rather <u>is</u> the whole. Whatever is done to the part is therefore thought to affect the whole. This principle can be seen in operation in some magical practices.[4]

A further aspect of the mythical mode of perception is its tendency to hypostatize properties and processes, which are functional or relational concepts, into material objects. Cassirer gives the example of the Hupa Indians, who look upon pain as a substance. Behind the ritual of the scapegoat is a similar belief in the materiality of the evil from which the community is suffering and which, consequently, can be transferred on to the scapegoat. The mythical concept of <u>mana</u> and its variants like <u>manitou</u>, <u>wakanda</u>, and <u>orenda</u> are similar hypostatizations of concepts which are relational rather than substantial. Cassirer rightly points out that this tendency persists even in scientific thinking, as in the concepts of aether, or of force as a physical substance, or in the various explanations of fire in terms of 'thermal substance' or 'phlogiston'.[5] Carl Jung and Gaston Bachelard have also studied the persistence of mythical concepts in science and philosophy, though Jung takes a more positive view of the role of myth in science than either Cassirer or Bachelard. According to him, far from being a hindrance to the development of scientific thought, myth,

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[3]Ibid., pp. 46-7. [4]Ibid., p. 64. [5]Ibid., pp. 55-9, 67.

on the contrary, prepares the ground for scientific discovery. For example, it is the primordial, archetypal idea of a universal magical power which finally leads to the modern concept of energy.[6]

The peculiar immediacy of the mythical perception of the object leads to certain characteristics of mythical thought that Cassirer explains with reference to what he calls 'the law of the concrescence or coincidence of the members of a relation in mythical thinking'. This law can be followed through all the categories of thought. Thus, in the category of quantity, we have already seen how the whole and the part are identified. This identity of the whole and the part is to be distinguished from the idea of harmony, in which the whole is conceived as a unity of diverse elements. In mythical thought the whole <u>is</u> the part in the sense that 'it enters into it with its whole mythical-substantial essence, that it is somehow sensuously and materially "in" it'. This principle can be seen at work, according to Cassirer, in totemic organizations, which are based upon a feeling of complete identity with the totem ancestor as well among all the members of the clan. Cassirer here uses Lévy-Bruhl's idea that the primary characteristic of primitive thought is 'mystic participation', where 'mystic' refers to anything supernatural and 'participation' to the principle by which anything could at the same time be something else.[7] A related explanation of totemism occurs in Jane Harrison's writings. She uses Durkheim's concept of 'collective representation' and Bergson's idea of <u>durée</u> to explain the nature of totemic society as a stage in epistemology when thinking is as yet 'undifferentiated', so that there is no concept of the distinctively human or individual personality. Magic, according to her, comes at a later stage of totemism when man becomes aware of his

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[6]Jung, <u>Collected Works</u>, vol. 7, pp. 66-7. For Bachelard, see <u>The Psychoanalysis of Fire</u>, translated by Alan C. N. Ross (London, 1964).

[7]Lévy-Bruhl, <u>Primitive Mentality</u>, pp. 7, 55, passim.

personality as distinct from that of the totem. It is only at this stage that the savage realizes that when he dances like an emu he is not actually an emu but only imitating one. Participation therefore comes before imitation, methektis before mimesis.[8] Jane Harrison was a disciple of Nietzsche, and indeed the idea of participation, of identifying oneself with something larger, the part with the whole, is central to his concept of the Dionysiac. We should note here that there are two steps leading to the idea of tribal mystic participation: first, a hypostatization of the whole, the genus or the tribe, and secondly, the identification of the part, the individual, with this hypostatized whole. As Cassirer remarks, 'the genus, in its relation to the species or individuals it comprises, is not a universal which logically determines the particular but is immediately present, living and acting in this particular'.[9]

A similar concrescence can be observed in the category of quality. In the scientific view, an attribute or quality is a function of a set of variables rather than a substantial thing. But mythical thought makes no distinctions between a thing and its attributes. To the mythical mind a substance does not 'have' different attributes; rather each attribute is substance, that is, 'it can be apprehended only in immediate concretion, in direct hypostatization'. Cassirer points out the practical application of this principle in alchemy as well as in the more primitive ritual of the scapegoat. What in scientific analysis 'dissolves into a mesh of relations' remains absolute and substantial in mythical thought.[10]

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[8] Themis, pp. xiii, 120-7.

[9] Symbolic Forms, p. 64. Lévy-Bruhl's idea of 'mystic participation' is now generally discredited. Lévi-Strauss, for example, sees the supposed totemic 'identification' of the individual with the genus or species in terms of the logic of 'universalization and particularization'. See Ch. 6 of The Savage Mind.

[10] Symbolic Forms, p. 65-7.

The same principle of concrescence can be observed in the category of similarity. To the mythical mind any perceived similarity becomes an expression of identity of essence. Similarity is not a mere concept but a physical force. For example, in what according to Cassirer is erroneously called 'analogy-magic', the mimetic gesture is not a 'representation' of something similar to it; rather, it is that something. In mythical thought therefore there is no mimesis because there is no distinction between the mimetic gesture and its 'meaning' or purpose.[11]

Passing from a consideration of mythical thought to the specifically mythical 'intuition' or 'life-feeling', the 'intuitive unity' that precedes and underlies all forms of mythical thought, Cassirer sees the basic trend of the mythical consciousness as the 'original division of the sacred and profane'. These are not categories for specific classes of objects; any object, even the most commonplace, can acquire the distinctive character of the sacred if it falls under 'the mythical-religious perspective', that is, if it can capture mythical interest or enthusiasm. The sacred is thus a matter of suffusing an object with value; without this sense of value, mythical thought could not proceed since it is by introducing differentiation into an 'indifferent reality' that all thought proceeds, and the characteristic mythical differentiation is precisely the one based on a sense of the value of the object that captures the imagination. The primitive concepts of mana and taboo are thus to be understood, not in terms of their objects, but rather as the accent placed on objects which are mythically significant. Mana according to Cassirer thus denotes that primordial wonder which is the beginning, not only of myth, but of religion and science as well.[12] Whatever captures the attention of the mythical mind is transformed under the mythical perspective into an object instinct with a mysterious life and power. The universe of the primitive man thus becomes a living universe.

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[11] Ibid., p. 68.

[12] Ibid., 75-9.

It has been pointed out earlier that the mythical mind always materializes what is merely ideal; it is now seen that at the same time it also 'spiritualizes' the merely material.

Having described the basic opposition between the sacred and the profane in the mythical mind, Cassirer goes on to discuss how this opposition determines the articulation of space, time, and number. Each of these concepts, in keeping with the hypostatizing that is typical of mythical thought, is considered as material rather than merely relational. Hence they are not conceived as continuous, uniform and homogeneous, as in scientific thinking, but as subject to the same qualitative differentiation between the sacred and the profane that marks all the objects of mythical thought. Thus there occurs the idea of a sacred space, which finally evolves into the institution of temples. There is also a sacred time, which is the time of beginnings. The sanctity of a mythical object or being derives from its origin in this absolute mythical past. Mythical time is different from historical time in that whereas in history the past is merely a <u>regressum in infinitum</u>, in myth it is absolute: 'The past itself has no "why" : it <u>is</u> the why of things.' It is in this sense that mythical time may be thought of as 'timeless'. Cassirer quotes in this connection Schelling's description of the mythical past as 'a kind of eternity, because it is itself not a sequence of time but only One Time, which is not in itself an objective time, i.e. a sequence of times, but only becomes time (that is, the past) relative to the time which follows it'. Mythical time is also different from scientific time in that it is qualitative and concrete; temporal as well as spatial intervals and dividing lines are not, for the mythical consciousness, merely conventional distinctions of thought, but 'possess an inherent quality and particularity, an essence of their own'. This is most marked in what Cassirer calls the mythical-religious 'sense of phases', by virtue of which any phase of life, human or cosmic, is marked by a character of holiness. The same characteristic mythical differentiation into the sacred and the profane can be observed in the concept of number, as is evident from the

wide-spread belief in the sacredness of certain numbers.[13]

The basic mythical intuition of the sacred and the profane is a matter of feeling rather than of thought. In An Essay on Man Cassirer emphasizes the emotional nature of myth. He writes that 'the real substratum of myth is not a substratum of thought but of feeling' and that the coherence of myth and religion 'depends much more upon the unity of feeling than upon logical rules'. This unity stems from the fact that the mythical view of nature is neither theoretical nor practical but 'sympathetic'; for the primitive man 'the deep conviction of a fundamental and indelible solidarity of life' unifies the multiplicity of forms. The whole of nature becomes one great society, the society of life, in which man shares a place with other creatures as well as with what to us are inanimate objects. The bond between man and nature is thus a bond between, to use Martin Buber's terms, an 'I' and a 'Thou'; myth expresses 'all natural reality in the language of human, social reality and expresses all human, social reality in the language of nature'.[14] David Bidney[15] has criticized Cassirer's identification of the 'feeling of unity' with the 'unity of feeling', and it is true that Cassirer has not given detailed arguments to justify this equation. Nevertheless, I do not believe that this is a real confusion since in actual experience it will be impossible to separate the two. Poets throughout centuries have been bearing witness to the intimate connexion between the equilibrium outside and within the mind, which is only to be expected if we consider that the macrocosm as we know it is a construct of the mind. If 'the centre cannot hold' within, then 'things fall apart' in the world outside, and vice versa.

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[13] Ibid., 106-9.

[14] An Essay on Man, pp. 81-2; Symbolic Forms, p. 192.

[15] 'Myth, Symbolism, and Truth', pp. 13-14.

This feeling of unity is so strong in the primitive mind that, according to Cassirer, it can 'deny and defy the fact of death'. 'In a certain sense', he writes, 'the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death.' This is done by opposing to the fact of death 'the unbroken unity and continuity of life'.[16] Death, in other words, is a matter that concerns individuals as individuals; it is annihilated insofar as the individual personality is annihilated by being identified with the community of nature and society.

Cassirer criticizes Freud for the latter's psychological reductionism, for attempting to explain a diversity of complex phenomena like myth, magic and art, in terms of their origin in a single psychological source. He similarly criticizes Schelling's philosophy of myth for attempting to reduce myth to a metaphysical absolute. His own phenomenological approach aims not at demonstrating the unity of myth as a unity of its psychological or metaphysical genesis but rather as 'the unity of a specific "structural form" of the spirit'.[17] Nevertheless, there are similarities between the approaches of Freud and Cassirer. The search for an origin is not the only interest in Freud's theory of myths and dreams. An important aspect of Freud's explanations of these phenomena is the demonstration of precisely the kind of 'logic' of identification and association, coloured by emotion, that Cassirer demonstrates in mythical thought. The mythical mind functions in a way very similar to the Freudian unconscious. Cassirer in fact quotes with approval the term 'omnipotence of thought' which Freud uses to characterize the magical world view, and writes that this world view 'is indeed nothing more than a translation and transposition of the world of

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[16] An Essay on Man, p. 84; see also The Myth of the State, pp. 47-9 and Symbolic Forms, pp. 159-62.

[17] Symbolic Forms, p. 11.

subjective emotions and drives into a sensuous, objective existence'.[18] The difference between Freud and Cassirer lies in the evaluation of the 'reality' of this mode of thought. For Freud, with his empirical, 'scientific' bias, the mythical world is, at best, an illusion, an escape from reality; for Cassirer, with his neo-Kantian idealism, the mythical world has its own reality precisely because reality is not something <u>given</u> which we passively receive, but something that we symbolically construct; and myth being a symbolic construction of reality has its own autonomy and reality.

Other writers have also stressed the autonomy and reality of the mythical consciousness, but with greater enthusiasm than Cassirer. The idea of myths as the 'dream-thinking of a people' is common to a large number of psychologists and anthropologists, including Freud, Jung, Jane Harrison and Cornford.[19] For Jung, however, in keeping with his idea that not all dreams are expressions of unconscious sexual desires since some of them point to deeper spiritual needs and processes, myths are also a repository of spiritual symbols. Philip Wheelwright has defined myth as 'man's primordial way of knowing'. He calls for a 'mythico-religious perspective' to replace the predominantly secular attitude that prevails in contemporary society. According to him this secular attitude lacks 'that haunting awareness of transcendental forces peering through the cracks of visible universe, that is the very essence of myth'. The mythical consciousness is 'a dimension of experience cutting across the empirical dimension as an independent variable'. This transcendental reference of myth is related to the fact that myth is the product of the communal rather than the individual mind, for the individual mind can only function on the horizontal plane of phenomena, whereas the communal mind participates in the mystery that exists

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[18] Ibid., p. 157. For a discussion of the similarities between Freud and Cassirer see Susanne K. Langer, 'On Cassirer's Theory of Language and Myth'.

[19] See G. S. Kirk, <u>Myth</u>, p. 273.

not on the horizontal plane but on a plane which is, so to speak, vertical to it.[20] It is not clear why only the communal mind can participate in this mystery; it seems to have been invoked in deference to Durkheim's emphasis on the collective aspect of religion as well as to some vaguely defined, hippy-like ideal of mystical participation. Generally it is the transcendental as well as the communal aspect of mythical thought that writers have in mind when they call for a revival of myth, or lament its death. Nietzsche is perhaps the major source of such ideas, though they can be traced further back to German Romanticism. There is no essential connection between these two aspects of myth, but they are often combined or confused.

Paul Tillich is another writer who has written on the transcendental dimension of myth. Tillich divides theories of religion into positive and negative theories. Negative theories deny the objective truth of symbols. As examples, Tillich suggests the theories of Freud and Marx. He also criticizes Cassirer because if, as Cassirer maintains, mythology is an autonomous cultural creation, it is difficult to see why it should give way to religion and science, as it does according to Cassirer. 'In short,' writes Tillich, 'the evolutionary and the transcendental conceptions of myth contradict each other.' Tillich suggests that the tension is resolved if it is realized that in religion myth does not disappear but merely alters its form. Thus the conflict is not between myth and religion but between one myth and another. Tillich distinguishes between two senses of the term mythical. According to one, it refers only to the 'unbroken mythical mentality', that is, a mentality that makes no distinction between myth, religion, and science and is therefore tied to belief in the literal truth of its images. If myth is understood in this sense, then it can be said to be transcended by religion because in religion truth is held to transcend all its images. But, on the other hand, mythical can refer

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[20] 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', pp. 10-13.

to every 'intuition of transcendence'. In this sense 'there is no such thing as an unmythical attitude and the myth is shown to be essential'. The usage is unsettled, according to Tillich, 'not because of the lack of scientific clarification but because of the inner dialectic that characterizes the concept of myth'.[21] Paradoxically, in other words, there is a built-in tendency towards transcendence of itself in every mythology, and this tendency is none other than the mythical attitude itself.

It is the belief in the literal truth or reality of its images that, according to Cassirer and Tillich, distinguishes myth from religion. In religion, in Cassirer's view, there is a striving towards 'a progressively purer spiritualization', though there is never a complete emancipation from the world of images. It is only in art that the tension between image and meaning is 'appeased, if not negated', because in art there is recognition of the image purely as such.[22] Frank Kermode has made a similar distinction between 'myth' and 'fiction', the former implying literal belief whereas the latter is conceived of only as a 'model' which has to be abandoned as soon as it has served its purpose. Literature, according to Kermode, is concerned with such fictions rather than with myth.[23] A precisely opposite definition of myth is given by D. G. James in Scepticism and Poetry where he makes a distinction between myth and dogma as follows: 'Mythology is the use of symbols which is not bound up with belief in its symbols; but dogma is bound to the denial that it is using mere symbols and to the assertion of the historical truth of its "symbols".'[24] It seems that what is 'myth' to Cassirer, Tillich, and Kermode, is 'dogma' to James, and what is

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[21] Paul Tillich, 'The Religious Symbol'.

[22] Symbolic Forms, pp. 260-1.

[23] The Sense of an Ending, p. 39.

[24] Scepticism and Poetry, p. 245.

'religion' to them, 'myth'. The contradiction can be reconciled, if at all, if we assume that Tillich and Cassirer are not using the term 'religion' in the sense of a narrowly dogmatic system of beliefs but in the more general sense of any intuition of transcendence. Cassirer's view that myth is marked by a belief in its images does seem to be closer to the real nature of myths, but when poets and critics speak of myth (especially when they speak of the need of a mythology) they usually use the term as D. G. James has defined it. There is, however, a curious wavering, of which Yeats's attitude toward his own mythological system is, I think, an instance. Tillich's idea of the inner dialectic in the very concept of myth seems to be the best explanation of this wavering as regards the question of belief. But transcendence, which he considers to be characteristic of the mythical attitude, is precisely what distinguishes the idea of the symbol as opposed to allegory or sign-language. Myth and symbol are indeed closely related concepts as will become clearer from the second part of this chapter.

There are three ways in which the idea of myth as a mode of thought is applicable to literature and critical theory. First, the term <u>mythical</u> can be applied to the literary work itself, as a whole, or to parts or aspects of it. Mythical literature then would be the kind of literature that shows the characteristic aspects of mythical thought. Not all literature, of course, is mythical in this view, but all myth is considered to be literature by some. <u>Mythical</u> can be used either in a positive or in a pejorative sense, depending upon the attitude toward the mythical mode of thought. Usually, however, it is the positive sense that critics have in mind. If a work is described as a myth, then, one can expect that the critic has in mind at least some of the characteristics of the mythical mode of thought that we have been describing. Secondly, a myth or a mythology, considered as the

expression of a mythical mode of thought or vision, can be taken as the subject-matter or background of a work, or a body of works, giving it a mythical dimension which would otherwise be missing. Thirdly, certain critical concepts and procedures themselves could be taken as manifestations of the mythical mode of thought. I shall now proceed to illustrate these different uses of the concept of myth in critical theory and practice. In actual usage, of course, such clear-cut distinctions are seldom in evidence.

The equation of myth with literature or poetry goes back at least to Vico whose New Science first appeared in 1725. In the second part of his book Vico describes the early age of man as the age in which 'poetic wisdom' determined all aspects of primitive life, including mythology and religion. What Cassirer described as 'mythical thought' is termed 'poetic logic' by Vico, and much of his New Science is concerned with tracing the working of this logic. A. Robert Caponigri points out that the term poetic in Vico's philosophy, is an adjective to describe 'the whole pre-reflective life of man, comprising both its gnoseological and its volitive movements'. Myth is the minimal, 'the cellular form' of the poetic consciousness. Poetry in its essence is a myth-making activity. In short, the Vichian poetics 'is a theory of myth'.[25]

Similar identification of myth and poetry can be found in Herder and other German Romantics, though the identification is seldom total. Shelley's belief that in primitive society all men were poets involves a similar identification. In more recent times, Richard Chase has most consistently maintained that all myth is poetry and that far from myth being the basis of poetry, it is poetry which is the basis of myths.[26]

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[25] Time and Idea, pp. 167-8.

[26] 'Myth as Literature', p. 10; see also Quest for Myth, esp. p. 78.

It is not, however, only in these explicit identifications of myth and poetry that the relevance of the mythical or primitive mode of thought, as described by Cassirer and others, to poetic theory is to be discovered. In fact, an entire tradition of poetic theory seems to be behind the theory of myth. This becomes clear when we realize that each of the characteristics of mythical thought as described in the first part of the chapter has also been seen as a characteristic of poetic thought, as I shall now proceed to show.

Like mythical thought, poetic thought has also been described as concrete and sensuous. It was Vico who first suggested that primitive language was pre-figurative since figures of speech imply the conceiving of abstractions, of which the primitive mind was incapable. Primitive language is thus pre-metaphoric.[27] The romantic symbol is also conceived of as transcending metaphor or simile by identifying the image and the idea, the general and the particular. The symbolic image, we can say, adapting Cassirer's description of the mythical image quoted earlier, does not stand for the 'thing' or 'idea', it is actually identical with it. In fact, it becomes difficult to determine whether the romantic concept of myth has been conditioned by its concept of the symbol, or whether its concept of the symbol has been conditioned by its concept of myth. One might add that a similar doubt arises whether Cassirer's account of the mythical or primitive mind has not been, at least partly, determined by the romantic concept of the symbol. Poetry and myth are not identified by all romantics, of course. The difference between the two can be described as the difference between the unity which is something given prior to the differentiation between the 'idea' and the 'image' and the unity that is achieved in spite of the differentiation. The romantic symbol is a product of the imagination's effort to recreate the primordial unity of

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[27] New Science, translated by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, abridged edition (New York, 1961), para 409, p. 90.

myth. The dialectic runs from 'undifferentiated' unity through differentiation to what may be called the 'synthetic' unity of the symbol.

In Language and Myth Cassirer describes a similar process in the development of language. Myth is the matrix from which language, religion, art, science and history, all emerge as autonomous symbolic forms in a gradual process of differentiation. In the beginning the signifying function of words is not distinct from their magical function. The distinction between the 'word' and its 'meaning' is not yet apparent. Language attains its autonomy only when this distinction is grasped. Art, however, is always striving to regain this primitive, magical value of words, and to synthesize the word and its meaning. The symbol also shows the concrescence of relations that according to Cassirer characterizes mythical thought. The most common concrescence is of the whole and the part and of things which are similar. These two categories are neatly combined in the concept of the microcosm. The microcosm is not thought of merely as a part of the macrocosm, but neither is it supposed to be merely analogous to it; it is both and also something more. The romantic symbol is conceived of as precisely such a microcosm, whether it be in the form of an image within a poem or a poem in its totality. Thus, when Blake writes about seeing 'Heaven in a Wild Flower' the flower is not merely a metaphor for heaven. Rather, heaven itself is thought of as permeating the flower as it permeates everything else.

The wild flower as microcosm also illustrates the similarity between the romantic symbol and the primitive intuition of the sacred and the profane. I spoke earlier of the transcendental impulse of myth and symbol. The mythical vision has this transcendental dimension because in it everything is marked with the character of the sacred or the holy and so becomes more than a mere 'thing'. The romantic symbol is similarly transcendental because it too is instinct with the feeling of something larger than itself. The symbolic poet blessing all that he

looks upon is like the primitive 'spiritualizing' every object with the accent of the sacred. Thus, to the poetic imagination the whole universe is a universe of living beings rather than dead objects. In Wordsworth and Coleridge the loss of this sense of the living universe, as well as delight when it is present, is expressed with great intensity. Richard Chase, in fact, has characterized myth as 'magic literature', that is, 'literature which achieves the wonderful, uncanny, or brilliant reality of the mythical vision of things'.[28] It is precisely this sense of the wonderful that the Romantics were trying to capture, the wonderful ranging from 'the charm of novelty' in everyday things to the sense of the uncanny and the preternatural as in Wordsworth's Resolution and Independence, which Chase mentions as an example of a truly mythical poem. Any work, then, which invests things with a preternatural force, with mana is mythical. The mythical nature of a work does not depend on the use of a mythological story, but rather on this mode of sacralizing vision. Kafka would be considered more truly mythical in this view than, say, Anouilh or Sartre, who have both used stories from Greek mythology in their plays. Kathleen Raine maintains that metaphor, symbol, personification and, 'at the apex, myth', are in an ascending scale of 'increasingly animistic assumptions about the world'. In the mythical view 'the world is, in its whole and in its parts, living and conscious'.[29] In the absence of such a belief, the figures of speech become barren of meaning. Carl Jung has also emphasized the accent of the preternatural, of what, following Rudolf Otto, he terms the 'numinous', that marks the truly archetypal image in dreams, literature or myth.[30] Mythical literature, in this view, is literature that has the numinosity of the true myth.

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[28] 'Myth as Literature', p. 10.

[29] Defending Ancient Springs, p. 109.

[30] See the introductory essay by Jung in Man and his Symbols.

The feeling of solidarity with the community and with nature at large that Cassirer thought to be the most important aspect of the mythical attitude is present in romantic thought, if not as a fact, then at least as an ideal. Once again it is Wordsworth who has most often expressed both this feeling of unity as well as the longing for it. The Immortality Ode very nicely illustrates Cassirer's idea that it is the sense of the indestructible unity of life that enables the primitive to negate the fact of death. The 'Recollections of Early Childhood' give 'Intimations of Immortality' precisely because early childhood is an age of complete harmony with nature as well as the age in which everything is apparelled in a numinous, 'celestial light'. The child, in keeping with the principle of the parallel between ontogeny and phylogeny (another example of the mythical concrescence of similars?), represents the primitive vision of an undivided and living universe, hence the romantic cult of the primitive and of the child.

In Freudian psychology (as well as in the genetic epistemology of Piaget) there is a development of this association of infantile thinking with the primitive, mythical mode of thought, though without the positive view of either that is typical of the romantics. F. C. Prescott, one of the first literary critics to apply Freudian psychology to the poetic mode of thought, made a distinction between two modes of thought, the usual waking mode, and the mode of dreams. Jung had also made a similar distinction. Prescott equated the dream mode of thought with the imagination of the child and the primitive as well as with poetry. 'The myths are dreams and they are poetry: all three come to the same thing.'[31] According to this view then mythical literature should be equivalent to dream-literature. But not all dream-literature is considered to be mythical, of course. 'Mythical' usually refers to a higher kind of dream: the dream which is a reaching out to truth rather than mere expression of infantile desires.

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[31] The Poetic Mind, p. 67.

The theory of literature as the product of a mythical mode of thought has often been criticized for its primitivism. But to view literature as mythical need not necessarily involve this. To the romantics the primitive and the child were more in the nature of metaphors for a spontaneous, undivided mode of thought than persons to be emulated. Mythical thought tends to explain a logical problem in terms of temporal origins, a characteristic that Kenneth Burke has termed the 'temporizing of essence'.[32] The idea of a past age of undivided, spontaneous sensibility, of undifferentiated unity, may be seen as an instance of this temporizing of essence, of projecting what is thought of as logically or epistemologically prior as the temporally prior. In this sense it does not matter if the actual primitive consciousness is shown to be different from the pre-logical, 'mystical', consciousness that Cassirer, Lévy-Bruhl, and others have described. The pre-logical may not be temporally prior to the age of logic, but it is 'prior' in terms of the value attached to it by the poets. This non-temporal priority is projected as temporal priority in keeping with the mythical mode of thought. I do not want to suggest that Cassirer's work on myth is itself mythical, but this can certainly be said of the romantic cult of the primitive and the child. The primitive and the child are myths; the important thing is to try to understand the problems that these myths are trying to solve. Frank Kermode has often, and I believe quite rightly, criticized the primitivism that is involved in the mythical approach to art.[33] But at the same time it should also be borne in mind that the primitivism of the romantics is often an aspect of their poetic theory rather than their poetic theory a consequence of their primitivism. It is true that poetry is considered to be 'primitive', but that is so only because the primitive mind is thought to be 'poetic'.

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[32] Language as Symbolic Action, p. 381.

[33] See especially 'The Myth-Kitty' and 'Northrop Frye' in Puzzles and Epiphanies; see also Wallace W. Douglas's essay listed in the Bibliography.

The term mythical can also be used to describe certain aspects of a work. For example, Genesius Jones considers myth as a structural principle. In the next chapter I shall consider Northrop Frye's idea that myth is a structural principle in literature. But Father Jones has something different in mind. He maintains that The Waste Land employs the mythical principle of concrescence as a principle of structural control. It is not, he argues, the use of a particular myth as a parallel to contemporary life that unifies the poem, but rather the merging together of different elements and categories, so that characters melt into one another in a constant mythical metamorphosis, and each part becomes a concrescence of the whole.[34] In this way a work can be organized mythically rather than narratively or logically. Shakespeare's sub-plots could also be seen in this light as 'mythically' or 'magically' related to the main plot.

Parts of a work can also be called 'mythical' or 'magical' in a pejorative or positive sense. Thus, to illustrate the pejorative use, a work can be said to have arrived at a 'magical' solution, rather than a realistic one, to the problems it poses. 'Magical' (which is a sub-division of 'mythical') in this sense implies escapist literature. This is a consequence of equating 'myth' with 'dream' in the Freudian sense, that is, with a strong sense of the opposition of these to 'reality'. It is in this sense that C. L. Barber has described the expulsion of Falstaff as 'magical' and hence unsatisfactory.[35] Art, in this view, should be an escape from myth and dream rather than a return to it. More generally, however, the mythical element in a work is identified with its source of vitality.

Myth, or mythology, as the product of the mythical mode of thought, could be considered as being external to the work of art and providing

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[34] Approach to the Purpose, pp. 59-60.

[35] Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, pp. 213-221.

it with subject-matter or background. It is in this sense that poets and critics have written about the need for myth or a mythology. Such a myth need not be a story; it can be a system of beliefs or a particular belief. It should, however, either be communally shared or have the characteristics of the mythical mode of thought as has been described above. The aspect of communal sharing will be discussed in Chapter 5. Here it is sufficient to note that it is an important aspect of the cry for myth from Schelling onwards. Philip Wheelwright distinguishes three attitudes to a given mythology. When it is literally believed, or at least taken seriously, as in the case of Aeschylus and Dante, the poet's task is the elaboration of some myth from this body of mythology. Shakespeare and Virgil illustrate, according to him, the second attitude, a more sceptical one, and yet not entirely scientific; hence they make thematic use of myths. In the modern age, however, myths are merely used as antiquarian curiosities, since the scientific-secular attitude has destroyed any kind of belief in myth. This point of view can only be understood if we bear in mind that myth here does not merely imply a communally accepted system of beliefs, but a system of beliefs in a transcendental, spiritual reality. Otherwise it becomes difficult to understand why the modern age should be considered as lacking a myth or mythology, when every day one hears about the imperative need to maintain the freedom of the western way of life, the life of freedom and democracy, from one side of the iron-curtain, and of western capitalists-imperialists and their lackeys, from the other. Wheelwright, in fact, explicitly states that the purely secular attitude toward myth is inadequate. He also makes a distinction between myth and ideology, the former, being a product of the truly communal mind, has a transcendental dimension which the latter, being the product of a mass mind, lacks.[36] This is a distinction that will concern us in Chapter 5.

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[36] 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', p. 12.

Finally, as I have suggested, the mythical mode of thought can be manifested in critical procedures and concepts themselves. I have already argued that the romantic concepts of the 'primitive' or the child, of an age of undivided, spontaneous unity of life and thought: of words and meanings, of images and ideas, of man and nature, of the individual and society, may themselves be considered as the result of a mythical projection of logical problems into a temporal dimension. Myth-criticism may be 'mythical' in another way. It has often been criticized for 'mistaking analogies for identities'.[37] But this mistaking of analogies for identities is precisely one of the characteristics of mythical thought as described by Cassirer. Behind the mode of typological exegesis that was examined in the first chapter is a similar mythical impulsion. I shall end with an extract from Hermann Oldenberg writing about the mythical representations in the Vedic religion as quoted by Cassirer:

> They fear one another, penetrate one another, interweave and pair with one another. . . . One passes into the other, becomes the other, is a form of the other, <u>is</u> the other. . . . It would seem that once two representations find themselves in a certain proximity, it is impossible to keep them apart.[38]

Once, we might say, the mythological critic finds two literary representations in a certain proximity (usually of analogy or similarity), he finds it impossible to keep them apart.

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[37] Robert Hapgood, 'Shakespeare and the Ritualists', p. 123.

[38] <u>Symbolic Forms</u>, p. 45.

CHAPTER 4

THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH TO MYTH

In this chapter I shall discuss the ideas of Northrop Frye and Lévi-Strauss concerning myth. Both of them have subtle and original minds and to do full justice to their theories would require another dissertation. I shall have to restrict myself, therefore, to the barest essentials of their theories even at the risk of considerable distortion of their views. But before I go on to discuss these two writers I would like to point out the pioneering role of T. S. Eliot for one aspect of myth criticism.

Somewhere around 1910, according to Virginia Woolf, human character changed.[1] In the realm of aesthetic theory, one could say, Wilhelm Worringer's Abstraction and Empathy, first published in 1908, and running into three editions (in German) in two years, is an important manifestation of this change. Worringer attempts a psychological study of style in art, arguing that there are two basic styles, the naturalistic and the abstract, reflecting, respectively, two basic attitudes to the external world: 'a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world', and 'a great inner unrest . . . a spiritual dread of space'. Characteristic of the abstract style, according to Worringer, are the geometrical forms, deliberately remote from all suggestions of organic life, that we find in Egyptian, Byzantine, and Oriental art. Generally speaking the abstract style is the more primitive, but this does not mean that it is lacking in technical sophistication. Worringer's sympathies are undoubtedly with abstract

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[1] See 'Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown', in Collected Essays, Vol. I (London, 1968), p. 320.

art as he feels that such art reflects a humbler and spiritually more refined attitude to the world.[2] T. E. Hulme popularized Worringer's ideas in Speculations, which was published posthumously in 1924, edited by Sir Herbert Read.[3] Usually when there is a call for the reappraisal of a particular kind of art of the past, the call is accompanied by -- more often than not, motivated by -- the emergence of a similar kind of art in the present. Worringer's and Hulme's reappraisal of abstract art was also accompanied by the emergence of the abstract style in painting and sculpture, an emergence prophesied by Hulme, though perhaps only after the event.

A parallel swing away from naturalism can be observed in literature around this time. The two aspects of naturalism in drama and the novel are, one might say, realistic characterization and a 'realistic' narrative in which events follow each other in a temporal sequence according to the laws of causality. Both are dispensed with in the novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence. 'Character' is dissolved into a field of psychic forces, of memory and desire, and 'plot' is dislodged by submerged structures of imagery and myth.

Writing about Joyce's Ulysses in 1923, T. S. Eliot suggested that it was possible, after its example, to use the mythical method rather than the narrative one to give order and coherence to the immense panorama of futility that is modern life. Eliot was thus the first to formulate the structural possibilities of myth.[4] No doubt he had also his own method in The Waste Land in mind. By juxtaposing the First World War with the Punic War in the first section of the poem he sought to comprehend the contemporary phenomenon. Eliot's use of myth was thus a method by which a contemporary experience could

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[2] p. 15.

[3] See esp. pp. 82 ff.

[4] 'Ulysses", Order and Myth', p. 483.

be understood by being placed in the total context of tradition, tradition being, essentially, the history of the particular culture considered synchronically rather than diachronically. A less serious use of myth could be as a long drawn-out comparison. Besides, the use of myth could remove the necessity of logical and narrative progression since while reading such a work one does not ask about a part of it: 'Does this necessarily follow that?' but rather: 'Does this correspond with that?' And it could be argued that the perceiving of such imaginative correspondences gives greater aesthetic pleasure than the mere following of a logical progression.

It is doubtful, however, whether Eliot and Joyce were really the first writers to realize and use the possibilities of the mythical method. Even poems like Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel and Pope's The Rape of the Lock use myths, biblical in one case and classical in the other, in order to comment upon contemporary experience by placing it in the larger context of the literary and cultural tradition.

Eliot was speaking of the conscious use of myths as the structural principle of a work of art, and I have argued that the practice is older than Eliot made it out to be. In fact there are a few critics who argue that even Shakespeare sometimes uses myths in order to give structural and thematic unity to his plays. I shall briefly mention these critics in Chapter 9. What is more common and new in contemporary thinking on the subject is the use of myths by critics to give shape and coherence to their perception of the work of art, even when there is no conscious use of myths by the artist. This procedure has been justified by some by arguing for the common origin of works of literature in myths and rituals, and by others by postulating a 'collective unconscious' or a universal human mind. A third group of critics tends to dismiss this question or origins as irrelevant to poetics and dwells, instead, upon the logical relationship between myths and literature. In thus adopting a synchronic rather than a diachronic model of literary tradition the critics of this third group are in harmony with a major

trend in several intellectual disciplines, especially anthropology and linguistics. Foremost among these critics is Professor Northrop Frye, to whose ideas about myth I shall now turn.

Northrop Frye has become associated in common parlance with the 'myth-and-ritual' approach and with 'archetypal' critics like Maud Bodkin. Frye himself has, however, pointed out that this indicates a total failure to understand his theories. As he puts it: 'I resemble [Miss Bodkin] about as closely as I resemble the late Sarah Bernhardt.'[5] Nevertheless, it is easy to see how this association could have occurred. In his fondness for schemas of archetypal images, Frye resembles some of the critics whom I have discussed in Chapter 1, especially Jung and Colin Still. For example, in an essay entitled 'New Direction from Old', Frye builds up a 'cosmology' of which the basic organizational principles are the changes of the seasons and the dialectic between higher and lower forms of consciousness, or, to put it in different terms, between desire and repugnance, innocence and experience. Poetry, according to Frye, 'seeks the typical and the recurring'. He goes on:

> The basis for organizing the imagery of the physical world has been the natural cycle. The sequence of seasons, times of day, periods of life and death, have helped to provide for literature the combination of movement and order, of change and regularity, that is needed in all the arts. Hence the importance, in poetic symbolism, of the mythical figure known as the dying god, whether Adonis or Proserpine or their innumerable allotropic forms, who represent the cycle of nature.[6]

The physical world, however, is not merely a cyclical world but also a 'middle earth' between a higher and a lower world. (An idea very similar to Colin Still's of 'planes of consciousness' and their

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[5] 'Mythos and Logos', p. 6.

[6] Fables of Identity, p. 58.

corresponding 'mythical realms'.) There are, according to Frye, two points of particular significance in poetic symbolism: one, the point where the upper and the middle world meet, usually conceived of as the top of a mountain, and two, the point where this world meets the lower world, usually symbolized by a labyrinthine cave. Behind this foreground of images is 'the background of roughly four levels of existence' which Frye, borrowing a term from Theodor H. Gaster, calls 'topocosm'. These four levels are:

1. The presence of God -- grace and providence -- the starry heaven
2. 'Human' nature -- symbolized by the Garden of Eden
3. The physical nature -- fallen, but morally neutral
4. Sin, death, and corruption [7]

These four levels of existence could be subsumed under the more inclusive categories of the world of innocence and the world of experience, and Frye's major critical objective seems to be to place all works of literature within this broad framework.

Passages such as the one above show the influence on Frye's thought of the kind of allegorical and typological exegesis of scriptural material that we discussed earlier. The difference between such exegesis and Frye's brings out the latter's contribution to literary studies very clearly. As I argued in Chapter 1, a good deal of criticism of literature in terms of archetype and myth was an extension to literary material of modes of exegesis applied to the Bible and other scriptural material. The extension was not, however, always conscious and theoretically justified; the critics were content to relate the particular work (generally a much admired work) to a basic pattern of archetypal images or of mythical events and to interpret this pattern allegorically as the embodiment of some timeless truth. Frye is fully conscious of the relation of his tabulations and schemas to such 'myth-criticism'. Commenting on his table of apocalyptic imagery in Anatomy of Criticism he writes:

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[7] Ibid., 58-9, 63.

> Allegorical alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Cabbalism, Freemasonry, and the Tarot pack are all typological constructs based on paradigms similar to those given here. For the literary critics they are simply reference tables: the atmosphere of oracular harrumph about them, which recurs in some forms of archetypal criticism, is not much to the point.[8]

The 'oracular harrumph' can take several forms. It can, for example, consist in gestures of reverence towards a hidden universal significance, or in statements about the primordial origins of the narrative and imagistic paradigms, either in the remote past, or in the depths of the individual unconscious, or, deeper still, in the collective unconscious. Frye wants to emancipate his use of the concepts of myth and archetype from all these approaches which, in his terms, would be described as either historical or allegorical. His approach to the concepts claims, in contrast, to be purely literary. Another instance which brings this out is the following comment on 'solar mythology':

> When archetypal criticism revived in the nineteenth century with a vogue for sun myths, an attempt was made to ridicule it by proving with equal plausibility that Napoleon was a sun myth. The ridicule is effective only against the historical distortion of the method. Archetypally, we turn Napoleon into a sun myth whenever we speak of the rise of his career, the zenith of his fame, or the eclipse of his fortunes.[9]

Frye is different from the earlier myth and ritual critics in using the concepts of myth and archetype in a non-allegorical, non-psychological, and non-historical sense. He points out in the Anatomy that 'one element in our cultural tradition which is usually regarded as fantastic nonsense is the allegorical interpretations of myths', and suggests that myth, being a 'centripetal structure of meaning' can be made to mean an indefinite number of things. In literary criticism, therefore, he suggests, myth does not mean a story with a profound moral but 'mythos, a structural organizing principle of literary form'. Similarly, archetype is defined not as an image rising from the Anima

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[8] Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 359-60.

[9] Ibid., p. 110.

Mundi or the collective unconscious but as a symbol, usually an image, 'which recurs often enough in literature to be recognized as an element of one's literary experience as a whole'. Myth, as it is an imitation of recurrent and generic action or ritual, is also defined as 'archetypal narrative'. Myth and archetype are thus, in Frye's terminology, the narrative and the significant aspects of the same thing. The major part of the Anatomy is concerned with 'archetypal' rather than allegorical criticism, that is, with the attempt to see literature as a 'total form' rather than as an aggregate of individual works.[10] Frye's kind of 'myth-criticism' is directed towards this total form of the verbal universe, and in this respect it seems to be very different from the allegorical-cum-typological criticism that we examined in Chapter 1.

When, according to Frye, we stand back from particular works in an attempt to see literature as a whole, we perceive that 'all themes and characters and stories that we encounter in literature belong to one big interlocking family'.[11] Frye is not, however, prepared to conclude from this any theory of the origin of the various forms; he is interested in tracing connections between the members of the family only 'logically, not chronologically'.[12] When we see literature as this big interlocking family of works, we can discern in it a single mythical story, 'which may not have existed as a whole story anywhere, but which we can reconstruct from the myths and legends we have'. This story, which has as its basis the cyclic order of nature and the tension between 'repugnance and desire', between 'identity with, or separation from nature', is 'the story of the loss and regaining of identity'. This story, according to Frye, is the 'framework of all literature'. Inside it

> comes the story of the hero with a thousand faces, as one critic calls him, whose adventures, death, disappearance and marriage or resurrection are the focal points of what later

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[10] Ibid., pp. 341-2, 365-7.

[11] The Educated Imagination, p. 48.

[12] Anatomy, p. 109.

> become romance and tragedy and satire and comedy in fiction, and the emotional moods that take their place in such forms as the lyric, which normally does not tell a story.[13]

Elsewhere Frye writes that 'the mythical backbone of all literature is the cycle of nature, which rolls from birth to death and back again to rebirth'.[14]

This 'ur-myth' in its totality determines the structure of literature as a whole and the phases of this ur-myth become the structural principles of individual works and classes of works. The process by which myths and rituals enter literature as its structural principle is as follows. Primitive ritual is 'not only a recurrent act, but an act expressive of a dialectic of desire and repugnance: desire for fertility or victory, repugnance to drought or to enemies'. There are thus rituals of integration and rituals of expulsion.[15] These ritual acts are accompanied by a story or myth which 'establishes an inter-related significance among them'.

> Literature, in the form of drama, appears when the myth encloses and contains the ritual. This changes the agents of the ritual into the actors of the myth. The myth sets up a powerful pull away from magic: the ritual acts are now performed for the sake of representing the myth rather than primarily for affecting the order of nature. In other words, drama is born in the renunciation of magic, and in The Tempest and elsewhere it remembers its inheritance.[16]

The shapes of the myths, when they enter literature, become 'the conventions that establish the general framework of narratives'.[17]

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[13] Educated Imagination, pp. 28, 51-55.

[14] A Natural Perspective, p. 119.

[15] Anatomy, p. 106.

[16] Natural Perspective, p. 59.

[17] Ibid., p. 61.

Myth, in other words, becomes a structural principle in literature. This is an idea often reiterated by Frye. He argues that myths and folk tales (and in this respect the difference between them is not important) are 'pure verbal design'.[18] This is so because they are as near as possible to the structure of human desires; they have not been 'displaced' by the demands of plausibility and morality.[19] But behind even the most realistic works one can discern the basic dialectic of human desires, and archetypal criticism is the process of uncovering this dialectic.

Since conventions are descended from myths, and since, as Frye argues, in myth there is 'identity of personal character and natural object', it follows that the importance of the conventions is that they help to recapture 'the pure and primitive identity of myth'. And as it is presumably a deep-rooted desire in mankind as a whole, it also follows that the most popular literature will be that which is most conventional, since it is through the conventions that the primitive identity of myth can be recaptured. Frye thus proposes the equation of the terms, popular, conventional, and primitive. The popular, according to him, is 'the continuing primitive, the creative design that makes its impact independently of special education'. The primitive is 'not the old fashioned, but the archaic, the region of origins and beginnings'. Shakespeare's art, especially in the comedies and the romances, is popular and primitive in this sense. There are deliberately archaic elements in all his plays and the effect of this archaizing tendency is 'to establish contact with a universal and world-wide dramatic tradition'.[20]

Frye, it is clear, is interested in myths and conventions only because through them he can attain vision of this world-wide dramatic

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[18] The Stubborn Structure, p. 63.

[19] For the definition of 'displacement' see Anatomy, p. 365.

[20] Natural Perspective, pp. 53-54, 58-61.

tradition. But there are some difficulties in this view. First of all, Frye never explains why, if the popular and the conventional are synonymous, some really conventional art, in his sense of the word, is unpopular. Folk tales, he has argued, are conventional; the more conventional an art-form becomes, the closer it approaches the pure, undisplaced structure of myth, indeed, according to Frye, becomes pure structure itself. And as communication may be thought to take place through structure rather than surface content, it is easy to see why folk tales, which are almost pure structures, should be popular. But Frye also mentions 'the use of myth and metaphor in contemporary literature', and the analogous tendency in the visual arts to emphasize 'abstract design', as instances of the trend towards pure structure, that is, one may infer, towards a conventional art.[21] But the fact is that such poetry, fiction, and painting have been elitist rather than popular. Frye's intention, I presume, is to try to make them popular by pointing out their similarity with primitive and hence popular art, but the problem remains that here are instances of conventional and primitive art which are not popular. One can get around the problem by suggesting that the popular is different from the merely fashionable, and this is the distinction which Frye, in fact, is constantly making. His distinction between stereotypes and archetypes is an analogous distinction. But the psychological and social reasons for the continuing popularity of certain conventional forms of fiction or other forms of art are never argued in detail.

Moreover, although Frye proposes to use myths and conventions as purely structural principles, his analysis of individual works is never really structural. Conventions seem to function in his criticism, as in the criticism of E. E. Stoll, as premature absolutes.[22] They are related

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[21] Stubborn Structure, p. 63.

[22] Arthur M. Eastman describes Frye as 'an anthropologically sophisticated E. E. Stoll'. See A Short History of Shakespeare Criticism (New York, 1968), p. 381.

to his desire to 'identify' or 'recognize' works of art rather than to evaluate them or to analyse their 'meaning'.[23] But recognition can only be the beginning of structural analysis, not the end. Thus a lot of statements in Frye's criticism referring to the importance of structure seem to be contrary to his actual practice, which is usually to demonstrate that a thing is as it is because it is meant to be that way. For example, he makes the statement that one needs a character like Blifil in Tom Jones 'for structural reasons, not merely to symbolize the author's disapproval of hypocrisy'.[24] This could lead to a proper structural analysis if Frye were to tease out the logical implications of the situation presented in the novel and deduce the character of Blifil and others from this basic situation (a kind of analysis in which Kenneth Burke excels).[25] But instead of elaborating upon such statements in the manner of Burke, Frye usually falls back upon his theory of genres and conventions, these being related to myth through a pseudo-historical regression and to the universal human mind through an extremely generalized psychology of the dialectic repugnance and desire.

Actually, it seems to me, Frye is not really interested in the structure of individual works at all. His emphasis on myths as structural elements in literature is related to his desire to see literature as a totality, and it is in the structure of this totality that he is primarily interested. It is, in fact, in terms of his interest in the total form of literature that Frye is able to distinguish his archetypal approach from the allegorical. As he writes in the Anatomy, 'translating imagery into examples and precepts [which is allegorical commentary] is a quite distinct process from following images into other poems'.[26]

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[23] See Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism, edited by Murray Krieger, p. 29.

[24] Natural Perspective, p. 40.

[25] See, for example, Burke's essay 'Myth, Poetry, and Philosophy' in Language as Symbolic Action.

[26] p. 103.

Frye's motto would thus seem to be: 'Don't allegorize -- only connect.' But there is a purpose in this connecting, and that is the revelation of what Frye calls the 'human apocalypse'. As he puts it:

> Literature as a whole is not an aggregate of exhibits with red and blue ribbons attached to them, like a cat-show, but the range of articulate human imagination as it extends from the height of imaginative heaven to the depth of imaginative hell. Literature is a human apocalypse, man's revelation to man, and criticism is not a body of adjudications, but the awareness of that revelation, the last judgment of mankind.[27]

But this apocalypse, we must remind ourselves, is the construct of an individual mind. Or rather, leaving aside for the moment the temptation to apply Occam's Razor, we may grant that the apocalypse is objectively there but insist that different people will see very different things in it. Of course, if it were really objectively there the critic could merely point to it in silence. But it is, first of all, a verbal construct of Northrop Frye's, which implies that some interpretation of the apocalypse is built-in in its structure, and secondly, Frye has to explicitly verbalize his sense of the significance of this apocalypse. In doing so he cannot escape from allegory, as I shall try to show presently.

Applauding Frye's liberal intention to 'only connect', we may accept his statement that Huckleberry Finn has one of the oldest themes in comedy, 'the freeing of a slave', or that the modern American Western is a version of the pastoral,[28] resisting the temptation to bring up obvious objections such as that slavery was an actual social fact in nineteenth century America, as in ancient Rome and Greece, or that the Western presents a very unpastoral picture of the relation between the whites and the Indians, not to mention the ideological glorification of actual conflicts between the two peoples from the point of view of the victors. We resist such obvious temptations because Frye has promised us a vision of the great human apocalypse, and such objections merely

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[27] Educated Imagination, p. 105; cp. Colin Still's idea of the 'Universal Tradition' mentioned in Ch. 1.

[28] Anatomy, pp. 43, 180.

lead us away from that goal of literary studies. Similarly, when Frye says that the 'meaning' of the individual work is not important, it being nothing more than a mere abstraction from our experience of the work, we cannot demur. The Winter's Tale, according to Frye, is not an allegory. As he puts it:

> in Shakespeare the meaning of the play is the play, there being nothing to be abstracted from the total experience of the play. Progress in grasping the meaning is a progress, not in seeing more in the play, but in seeing more of it.

But 'abstraction' (which is 'meaning') does enter Frye's criticism after all, as Reuben Arthur Brower points out with reference to the passage just quoted. Frye continues from the above passage as follows:

> Further progress takes us from the individual plays to the class of things called plays, to the "meaning" of drama as a whole. That meaning, again, is our total experience of drama. The centre of that experience is the fact that drama is doing, through the identity of myth and metaphor, what its ritual predecessors tried to do by the identity of sympathetic magic: unite the human and the natural worlds.[29]

The cat seems to me out of the bag at last. Abstraction, as Brower points out, is inevitable at some stage of critical discourse. Frye's use of the term 'meaning' within quotes, and of periphrases like the 'centre' of the experience of literature as a totality, cannot obscure the fact that he is, with reference to his own terminology, allegorizing here. The identity of man and nature in a state of paradisal innocence is, as I show in Chapter 1 and Chapter 6, a recurrent theme in 'myth-and-ritual' criticism. Such criticism would be described by Frye as allegorical because it is concerned with the meaning of the individual work. But in spite of all his sophisticated machinery of systems of phases and modes and cycles, Frye sees in the totality of literature the same kind of thing that these critics saw in the individual works: the seasonal cycle, death and rebirth, identity of man and nature, the

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[29] Natural Perspective, pp. 116-17. For Brower's comments on this passage see his review of the book in Partisan Review, 33 (1966), 132-6.

world of innocence and the world of experience. One cannot avoid the sense of anti-climax after this, especially as Frye has reintroduced the 'oracular harrumph' in his own writing with reference to the totality of literature, the 'human apocalypse'. Lesser minds, as Frederick Crews points out, using the words of Freud about Dostoevsky's piety, have come to the same position with less effort.[30]

In the light of the above it can be seen that Frye's emphasis on myth and conventions is not merely because of his view that they are the structural principles of literature. They are made the structural principles because through them Frye can reach the primal unity of man and nature that has been held to be one of the characteristic features of the mythical mode of thought. The theory of myth as the structural determinant of literature is, I suggest, a mere sop to sceptical minds: Frye's real interest is in the kind of art that is closest to the mythic identity of man and nature. As Frank Kermode has put it: 'Perhaps the need for mythology has never been so richly expressed; yet this, like any other "sentimental" revival of myth, is an ironical comment on the society which calls for it.'[31]

Lévi-Strauss's theory of myth has not yet made its full impact on literary criticism, though one can anticipate the application of his method of analysing myths to works of literature. He has himself employed the structural approach to an analysis of Baudelaire's 'Les Chats' (in collaboration with Roman Jakobson), but I find this a very dull kind of technical analysis with which students of literature are not unfamiliar. I believe that it is his analysis of myths that will be more valuable, and certainly more influential for literary criticism than the linguistic-structural analysis of literary works, even though Lévi-Strauss himself

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[30] Psychoanalysis and Literary Process, p. 5.

[31] Puzzles and Epiphanies, p. 72.

makes poetry and myth into polar opposites.[32]

The purpose of myth, according to Lévi-Strauss, is 'to provide a logical model capable of overcoming contradictions'.[33] These contradictions may be social, logical, or psychological. Often they take the form of paradoxes, which usually result from a logical gap between natural phenomena and cultural explanations of them. The myth does not solve the contradiction in any logical sense, but it admits, implicitly, its failure to solve it, and its function lies precisely in this. The best way to clarify this idea is to give a brief account of Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the Oedipus myth, which first appeared in 1955. He begins by dividing the myth (or rather the set of myths concerned with Oedipus and his family) into its constituent units or 'mythemes'. These units are defined as 'bundles of relations'.[34] They are then arranged in four parallel vertical columns as follows.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
1. Cadmos seeks his sister Europa ravished by Zeus		2. Cadmos kills the Dragon	Labdakos=Lame(?)
	3. The Spartoi kill each other		
	4. Oedipus kills his father Laios		Laios = Left-sided (?)
		5. Oedipus kills the Sphinx	
6. Oedipus marries his mother Jocasta			Oedipus = Swollen-foot (?)
	7. Eteocles kills his brother Polynices		
8. Antigone buries her brother Polynices despite prohibition			

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[32] See Structural Anthropology, p. 210; 'Charles Baudelaire's "Les Chats" '.

[33] Structural Anthropology, p. 229.

[34] Ibid., pp. 211-13.

I have added numbers to the units in the table above to indicate the order in which the events occur. In the fourth column, however, the units are not events, but common features associated with the three figures. Having arranged the units of the myth in the above manner, Lévi-Strauss writes:

> We thus find ourselves confronted with four vertical columns, each of which includes several relations belonging to the same bundle. Were we to tell the myth, we would disregard the columns and read the rows from left to right and from top to bottom. But if we want to understand the myth, then we will have to disregard one half of the diachronic dimension (top to bottom) and read from left to right, column after column, each one being considered as a unit.[35]

Lévi-Strauss then proceeds to 'decode' the meaning of the myth in the following manner. The first column, he points out, contains relationships in which blood-relations are over-emphasized, that is, more intimate than they should be. The common feature of the second column is the reverse of the first column. All the events here recorded represent the undervaluing of blood relations. (One may note here that taken by itself, the interpretation of Antigone's burial of her brother as over-valuing of blood relations may seem forced, but taken in the context of the fact that the brother of Antigone has been killed by his own brothers, it seems quite obviously a contrast to it.) The third column refers to monsters being slain. As these monsters are conceived of as autochthonous beings, the common feature of this column may be interpreted as 'denial of the autochthonous origin of man'. The fourth column contains references to difficulties in walking straight or keeping upright, and the import of this common feature is the 'persistence of the autochthonous origin of man'. It is thus seen that column two and column four are the reverse of columns one and three respectively. The difference between the first two columns is of the same kind as the difference between the other two. As Lévi-Strauss puts it, 'the over-rating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the

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[35] Ibid., p. 214.

attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility of succeeding in it'. Now the contradiction that the myth is trying to resolve is between the religious theory of the Greeks,according to which man was autochthonous,and the observed fact of nature that men are born of two parents. The myth's way of 'solving' this problem is to relate it to another and derivative problem which is equally insoluble, namely, 'born from different or born from the same'. By thus relating one insoluble problem to another analogous and insoluble one the initial problem is 'solved'. 'Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true'.[36]

This very sophisticated method of solving a problem by obfuscating it does not, however, operate at the conscious level. Hence the process of decoding the 'message' of the myth through structural analysis may be described as a process of revealing the 'deep structure' of the myth. In some respects this method of depth analysis is similar to the 'spatial' analysis of Shakespeare's plays that G. Wilson Knight advocated in The Wheel of Fire (1930).[37] Wilson Knight suggested that we should try to see the plays of Shakespeare as spatial areas of the mind, dwelling upon the 'set of correspondences which relate to each other independently of the time-sequence which is the story'. These sets of 'correspondences' are analogous, I suggest, to Lévi-Strauss's 'mythemes' or units of 'bundles of relations', and Knight's disregarding of the temporal sequence is parallel to Lévi-Strauss's synchronic analysis. In terms of familiar critical terminology the 'mythemes' could also be described as 'image clusters' or 'recurrent motifs'. Thus, lameness would be considered as a recurrent motif in the myth; other critics have noted the recurrence of the motif connected with sight in the version of the myth presented in Sophocles's play. All such studies of recurrent motifs, images, and sets of correspondences are, I suggest, examples of the kind of synchronic

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[36] Ibid., pp. 215-16.

[37] p. 3.

analysis that Lévi-Strauss is advocating. His contribution to literary studies could thus be the introduction of greater rigour in such analysis rather than a radically new procedure.

In his essay on the Oedipus myth Lévi-Strauss describes the structure of myth as a ' "slated" structure which comes to the surface . . . through a process of repetition'. These slates are not, of course, entirely identical. Theoretically, an infinite number of slates can be generated, each one slightly different from the others. 'Thus myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted.'[38] (It should be borne in mind that 'myth' here means all the variants of the myth rather than a single embodiment of it.) Now, I believe that this concept of the slated structure of myth also has its parallel in critical theory, especially with regard to the plays of Shakespeare. The idea of repetitions of motifs with a slight difference each time is familiar in what is known as the 'imagery' approach. In fact the musical metaphor of the leitmotif is applied to the structural function of imagery by a number of writers.[39] A similar concept of structure appears in Francis Fergusson's idea of the 'analogical' structure of the plays of Shakespeare. He shows in his essay on Hamlet in The Idea of a Theater that most of the events in the play could be interpreted as variations on the theme of finding the hidden imposthume in the kingdom of Denmark. These variations or analogies on the same theme are parallel to the repetition of a theme through the variants of a myth.

Lévi-Strauss is, as I have pointed out, usually concerned with a set of myths each of which is a variant of the others. But he suggests that this is so only because of practical reasons. A myth lacks many

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[38] Structural Anthropology, p. 229.

[39] Consider, for example, the term 'leading motives' in Caroline Spurgeon's 1930 Lecture to the Shakespeare Association, Leading Motives in the Imagery of Shakespeare's Tragedies (London, 1930). Significantly enough, Lévi-Strauss professes deep reverence for Wagner. See The Raw and the Cooked, p. 15.

'levels' of variables which are to be found in a poem or a play: semantic, phonetic, prosodic, etc. And since structural analysis can only proceed if there is a system of variables, one has to find these variables not within the particular embodiment of the myth, but in the multiplicity of versions of the same myth.[40] A work of art, on the other hand, is, in a loose sense, analogous to a <u>set</u> of myths and therefore can be analysed in isolation, as Lévi-Strauss demonstrates in the case of Baudelaire's 'Les Chats'.

However, it should also be possible to apply the method of analysis to a number of plays as though they were variants of the same myth. An example of this is Jan Kott's analysis of the variants of the Hamlet and Orestes myths (which I discuss in Chapter 9). This would be especially appropriate where certain themes and episodes recur in a writer's works, as they do in Shakespeare's. The intention of such analysis would be to discover the fundamental 'contradictions' that the 'myth' of Shakespeare is trying to reconcile. It would be possible to choose other 'sets' for analytical attention, depending upon the kind of variables we are interested in. A 'set' could, for example, comprise works dealing with similar themes by different authors at one period of time, or different versions of a story over a length of time, considered synchronically rather than diachronically (i.e., in terms of influence), or a group of cultural objects in different media. (The difficulty with the idea of a 'set' is that to prove that it is a set one will have to analyse it structurally, but to analyse it structurally one has to assume that it is a set. But I do not think that the procedure is as circular as Mary Douglas claims it is.[41] It has at least a heuristic value.) However, there is very little in the way of application of Lévi-Strauss's theories in the field of Shakespeare criticism and there is little point in suggesting possible applications. What I am interested in suggesting is the parallels

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[40] "Les Chats" ', pp. 202-3.

[41] See her review of <u>Raw and Cooked</u> in <u>The Listener</u>, 84 (1970), 313-14.

between some of these ideas and ideas already familiar in literary theory and practice.

Kenneth Burke's writings in particular contain many anticipations of Lévi-Strauss's ideas. Burke, for example, draws attention to the similarity between the structure of music and myths and folk tales, a similarity which Lévi-Strauss brings out in far greater detail and with far greater ingenuity.[42] There is even greater similarity between the two with respect to their broader purpose. Both Burke and Frye are concerned with their respective fields of cultural study as aspects of symbol systems in general. Burke also supplies an interesting variation on the idea of myth as an attempt to overcome a contradiction. He suggests (as pointed out in Chapter 3) that a characteristic of the mythical mode of thought is 'the temporizing of essence',that is, the projecting of a logical relationship as a temporal, causal one. By thus temporally projecting a logical problem (Lévi-Strauss's 'contradiction') one manages to 'transcend' it. As Burke writes: ' "transcendence" is the solving of the logical problem by stretching it out into a narrative arpeggio, whereby a conflicting element can be introduced as a "passing note," hence not felt as a "discord" '.[43] This can usefully supplement Lévi-Strauss's account of the way myths transcend logical or social contradictions, especially as Lévi-Strauss does not really take the temporality of the mythical structure into account. Moreover, the idea fits in with traditional literary insight into the way in which literary or artistic form gives one a sense of control over recalcitrant or disturbing facts of life or emotions. In this loose sense the idea of art as concerned with the reconciling of contradictions has been familiar for a long time, and it is in such a loose sense that Michael Howard Riley has applied Lévi-Strauss's idea to King Lear.[44]

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[42] Compare Burke, Counter-Statement, p. 36 and the 'Overture' to Raw and Cooked.

[43] The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 84

[44] See Ch. 9, and the section on the play in Ch. 7.

In some ways, then, Lévi-Strauss's ideas have been familiar among literary critics, His rigorous method of analysis of myths should not only help to carry on the structural method of analysis initiated by G. Wilson Knight, but also give it greater rigour and precision. And if such analyses of literary works are undertaken with a view not to illustrating Lévi-Strauss's theories but to understanding the works themselves, some real illumination may well occur.

CHAPTER 5

MYTH AND SOCIETY

In this chapter we shall be concerned with the function of myth in society. It is widely agreed that myth is collective in origin, but in the theories that we have discussed so far, with the possible exception of the ritual theory, this collectivity has been understood in a non-historical sense. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, Lévy-Bruhl's of a pre-logical primitive mentality, Cassirer's of a mythical consciousness, and even Lévi-Strauss's idea of a generalized human esprit, are all non-historical concepts, purporting to explain the diversity of historical phenomena by referring them to the working of an autonomous spirit or mind. On the other hand, the psychoanalysts seek to explain myth as but a fantasy shared by a large number of individual subjects. In opposition to both these approaches, the sociological approach to myth is concerned neither with the transcendental or ahistorical subject, nor with the individual, but with what Lucien Goldmann has termed the 'transindividual subject'. The advantage of such an approach in dealing with cultural creations like myth (and, maybe, even literature) is obvious. First of all, the consciousness of an individual, certainly that aspect of it which is manifested in shared cultural creations, is determined by the social environment. Secondly, although it may be possible to determine the structure of the human mind in the abstract, this structure can hardly be given an autonomous status without unwarranted reification, for it is, to quote Goldmann again, 'not an autonomous and active entity which holds man prisoner, but an essential characteristic of the activity of a subject'.[1] The universal mind is

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[1] 'Ideology and Writing', p. 903.

never known directly, but only as it is mediated through the actions of individual and transindividual subjects. These actions are not, however, merely the concrete embodiment of universal structures, but are rather the response to particular problems in particular times and places, and structured not merely in accordance with inner mental constraints, but also by the external constraints of nature and society. No complete explanation of these actions can therefore ignore the nature of these external constraints imposed by nature and society, nor the particular problems to which the actions are a response. Lévi-Strauss's interest in myths stems partly from his belief that as myths are apparently the most free of all cultural forms, if it could be shown that even this freedom is merely an illusion and that myths are determined according to fixed structural principles, then a fortiori all other cultural forms must be shown to be determined.[2] But few anthropologists have argued that myths are 'free' in the sense of being unconditioned by the external environment, and one cannot help but feel that Lévi-Strauss's attempt to disprove the freedom of myth is rather unnecessary.

There are several ways of looking at the role of myth in society. We shall begin with the psychological function of myth since it is, after all, through individuals that it can have any social effect. According to Jung, myth is necessary for the health of any society since its function is to compensate for those aspects of life that are usually suppressed and in the absence of which the personality becomes one-sided and sick.[3] According to Joseph Campbell, the function of mythology is to alleviate the anxiety of the individual by constituting a 'second womb' for him.[4] Clyde Kluckhohn has also argued that the function of myth as well as ritual is 'the gratification (most often in the negative form of anxiety

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[2] The Raw and the Cooked, p. 10.

[3] See his introductory essay in Man and His Symbols.

[4] In Myth and Literature, edited by John B. Vickery, p. 21.

reduction) of a large proportion of the individuals in a society'.[5] By providing socially accepted channels for the expression of feelings of anxiety a mythology thus also ensures the solidarity of society. Theodor Reik had earlier discussed the social function of rituals from the viewpoint of psychoanalysis. Rituals according to his theory are sublimation and displacement of hostile impulses. Thus, for example, the function of the pseudo-maternal couvade, in which the husband goes through an act of sharing the labour pains of his wife, is primarily 'to protect the woman against the latent hostility and sexual aggression of the man'.[6] It is easy to extend this to cover the function of myths, since they too are forms of symbolic actions. Another writer makes a correlation between the characters in myths and the various identities whose struggle according to him constitutes the personality of the individual. Myth functions thus as a 'shaper of identities'. In society as well as in the life of the individual,the corpus of myths provides 'a set of possible programmatic identities',[7] which the society as well as the individual imitate. One could perhaps put it more simply by saying that myth provides a society with ideals to which it can aspire, though these ideals themselves are but the externalization of inner impulses. In the absence of adequate myths, individuals are compelled to search for individual inner identities rather than identify with the ideals of the society.

The idea of myth is indeed closely linked to that of identity, both at the collective and the individual level. This identity is created by unifying experience with reference to significant events in the past. In a sense therefore, without myth the life of an individual as well as of a society is chaotic and fragmentary, because without identity. It

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[5] 'Myths and Rituals : A General Theory', p. 57.

[6] Ritual, p. 56.

[7] Jerome S. Bruner, 'Myth and Identity', in Myth and Mythmaking, edited by H. A. Murray, p. 281.

was probably thinking along these lines that led to Schelling's argument, since repeated by numerous writers, that mythology could not have originated from a nation since a nation cannot exist without mythology. Ernst Cassirer, from whom I have taken the reference to Schelling, agrees:

> the mythical-religious consciousness does not simply <u>follow</u> from the empirical content of the social form but is rather one of the most important <u>factors</u> of the feeling of community and social life. Myth itself is one of these spiritual syntheses through which a bond between "I" and "thou" is made possible, through which a definite unity and a definite contrast, a relation of kinship and a relation of tension, are created between the individual and the community.[8]

Similar views about the necessity of myth have been expressed by writers as diverse as Nietzsche, Yeats, and T. S. Eliot. There are numerous other writers who attempt to relate the fragmentariness of modern life to the loss of the sustaining power of myth. Thus Philip Wheelwright feels that many of the ills of modern life are due to the loss of the transcendental and unifying function of myth, which has been replaced by the pseudo-collectivity of the mob united only by an ideology.[9] In other words without myth a society does not possess a sense of identity and hence of unity.

According to this view, then, it is myth which determines society rather than <u>vice versa</u>. It is a metaphysical theory of society rather than a sociological theory of myth that is being propounded. A people are united, not because of material circumstances but because they believe in a common mythology; it is this common mythology which makes them a coherent society or a nation. Mythology, according to Cassirer, is one of the modes in which the mythical consciousness is expressed. The essence of this consciousness is a feeling of the solidarity of all life in nature and society. It is, in fact, the essence

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[8] <u>The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms</u>, Vol. II, p. 177.

[9] See Chapter 3, Notes 20 and 36.

of the religious experience as well. But if this feeling of the unity of all life were really one of the factors of social life, it would be difficult to explain why there are so many different societies and nations and so many mythologies, which are, moreover, usually hostile to each other. It is an empirical fact that mythologies separate as much as they unite nations and societies. The yearning for a lost paradise may be one of the important aspects of myths of all nations, but this can barely obscure their implicit or explicit recognition of the ordinary world of differences and enmities.

The coherence imparted by mythology to a group of people is seen in two ways: either as the coherence of an 'organic community' or the coherence of the nation-state. But both are examples of 'spiritual' unity rather than a merely material one. Also, a clear separation between the two is not always possible. Yeats's attempt to create a living myth for the people of Ireland on the basis of Irish folk-tales and legends may be seen as an attempt towards the creation of an organic community as well as a unified nation-state. It has a political as well as a spiritual dimension. This is inevitably the case since a view of cultural unity presupposes a certain kind of political and economic structure, and political unity is usually based on, or supported by, appeals to the cultural unity of the people. In T. S. Eliot's announcement that he was a classicist in literature, Anglican in religion, and royalist in politics[10] there was a clear recognition of the interrelatedness of the three spheres, though I believe he would have opposed the reduction of any of these to any one sphere.

It is true, as we shall see, that mythology functions as a force of unity, but this does not justify the importance given to myth as the cause of unity and as something prior to society rather than as an expression of social needs. Such an over-valuation of mythology is, I believe, misleading as well as dangerous. The most notorious example

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[10] For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order (London, 1938), p. ix.

of a dangerous myth is, of course, the Nazi myth of the superior race. It may be seen to have been linked to the concept of the nation-state as well as to that of the organic community since it stressed, at least in theory, the 'organic' unity of a race that transcended national boundaries. The word 'organic', in this connexion, reassumes its original biological sense, and an organic community becomes one which is linked by the biological bond of blood. But even in its less extreme forms the theory of the priority of myth over society is generally misleading. Thus myth is often defined as the transcendent perspective on human life. If this means nothing more than that a desire to transcend the barriers imposed on man because of his position in time and place is universal and fundamental,it can be accepted without hesitation. Myth expresses according to this view the fundamental and universal desire to transcend human barriers. But, apart from the inevitable barriers of death and diseases, the others have their origin in society, and hence the transcendence expressed in myth is the transcendence of social as much as of natural human limitations. To understand a myth, therefore, it would be necessary to place it in the context of its time and place and the social problems it is trying to resolve through imaginative transcendence. Besides, the shape that this transcendence takes, even when the problems are universal to humanity, is determined by the structure of society and serves a social function. According to Northrop Frye, myth is the structure of human desires; as such it enters literature as its structural principle,since the world of literature is the world of human desires as opposed to the natural and the social worlds,which are corrupt and imperfect. Myth and literature are therefore autonomous, conditioned neither by individual psychology nor by society. But, as Graham Hough rightly points out, this way of thinking 'hypostatizes poetry or literature, sets it above and over against the world of historical experience. Society is corrupt, and literature is the repository of the compensating idea'. He argues that we have no right to this assumption because 'literature is a product

of society and history, not an authority outside them'.[11] What Mr. Hough says here about literature applies even more to myth since myth has a much more evident grounding in communal life. It is when this perception is obscured and myth is upheld as an autonomous force while at the same time its essential social role of providing a model for social action or organization is emphasized that myth becomes a dangerous force. Not all models are models for the improvement of society as a whole; some may seek to, or in any case function to, maintain the status quo by giving priority to spiritual transcendence, while others may merely provide outlets for the anxieties of a group or a whole society through the scapegoat mechanism. The only way to keep the undoubted power of myth in check is to recognise that like other cultural phenomena it too is a product of a particular time and place and can be understood only with reference to its context.

The difference between the sociological and the spiritual approach to myth is clearly brought out by the following example. We have seen that according to many writers modern society has lost its organic character and become fragmentary and chaotic because it has lost the sustaining power of myth. In other words it is myth which binds people together into an organic community. The idea that myth and an organic community are closely linked is also found among the sociologically orientated writers. For example, Christopher Caudwell argues that a living mythology arises from an organic, i.e., an undifferentiated, society. In other words it is an organic community that can create a living mythology rather than vice versa. Caudwell writes:

> The gods live for the primitive in the collective festival and the collective emotion. Because so little division of labour exists, because society is still so undifferentiated, the collective world of emotion in which the gods live penetrates every hour of the individual's life.

Caudwell goes on to argue that mythology is the opposite of religion because unlike the latter it demands no formal assent. This is so

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[11] 'Criticism as a Humanist Discipline', p. 41.

because it so 'interpenetrates the daily life of the primitive' that the question of belief does not arise. He writes:

> Faith becomes necessary when mythology ossifies into "true" religion. Faith and dogma are the signs of lack of faith and suspicion of doctrine. They show that mythology has in some way separated itself from society.
>
> How has this come about? Only because society has separated itself from itself; because the matrix of religion has become only a part of society, standing in antagonism to the rest of society. Because of this, religion becomes isolated from the rest of society. "True" religion marks the emergence of economic classes in society. The end of mythology as a developing thing is the end of undifferentiated tribal life.[12]

The difference between the two approaches to myth that we have been discussing is brought out very clearly here. The desirability of an undifferentiated or organic life is widely shared. But whereas some would seek to bring it about by creating and propagating a unifying myth, others would argue that we must begin by recreating an organic community, since it is the decline of such a community that leads to the death of mythology. A corollary of this view would then be that to seek the reinstatement of myth without first trying to change the structure of society would amount to obscurantism or 'mystification'. I believe that this would not be an unfair description of much of the contemporary interest in myth. Another way of describing the difference between the two approaches to myth is to examine the various senses of the term organic as applied to a community. It will be found the sense varies from organic as distinct from 'mechanical' or 'material' to organic as the opposite of 'differentiated' or divided, especially on the basis of class. Among poets and literary critics, the former meaning of 'organic' is by far the more frequent.

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[12] Illusion and Reality, pp. 35-7.

So far we have discussed myth considered either as a cause or consequence of an organic community. The term is, however, used in a more general sense to refer to the creation of any collectivity, whether 'organic' or not. E.M.W. Tillyard's definition will provide a convenient starting point. By the term myth, he writes:

> I refer to the universal instinct of any human group, large or small, to invest, almost always unconsciously, certain stories or events or places or persons, real or fictional, with an uncommon significance; to turn them into instinctive centres of reference; to make among stories A, B, C, D, all roughly having the same theme or moral, one, and one only, the type. Made thus typical, the story becomes a communal possession, the agreed and classic embodiment of some way of thinking or feeling.

Thus defined, mythical literature (that is, literature which draws upon some myth, or which has itself become mythical), since it is tied to the needs and aspirations of particular communities, is the very opposite of literature with a universal appeal.[13] Although some anthropologists have concentrated upon the universal aspects of myth in cross-cultural studies, the commoner approach is to study myth in close relation to its cultural or social context, which is quite appropriate if we accept that myth is a communal possession. This approach to myth becomes not merely appropriate but necessary when dealing with the myths of modern rather than primitive societies since we can assume, if only because of our inadequate knowledge of primitive societies, that the differences among modern societies are more important than, or at least as important as, the similarities, whereas the similarities among primitive societies are more marked. Even in the case of primitive societies, however, their myths have been studied in their concrete cultural and social context. Bronislaw Malinowski was among the first anthropologists to apply this method to the study of myths, and we shall now turn to a brief discussion of his theory.

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[13] Some Mythical Elements in English Literature, pp. 10, 13-15.

Malinowski's basic idea is that myth is neither symbolic-allegorical, nor explanatory, but, as he puts it, 'a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom'. Its function is to 'strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events'. It is a 'constant by-product of living faith, which is in need of miracles; of sociological status, which demands precedent; of moral rule, which requires sanction'.[14] Myth then is important, not for its truth-value but for its pragmatic value. It may be noted that there is a similarity between Malinowski's theory of myth and I. A. Richards's idea that poetry is not important for its truth of statement but for its effect in inducing a proper attitude to experience. The difference between the two lies in the emphasis given to different aspects of experience, psychological in one case, and social in the other. But though Richards is concerned primarily with the role of poetry in the psychological equilibrium of the individual, this leads to the wider concern with its role in society at large.

Myth is not, in Malinowski's view, merely the expression of an organic (i.e. 'undifferentiated') community. In fact according to him the role of myth is especially important during times of social stress. He writes:

> It is clear that myth functions especially where there is sociological strain, such as in matters of great difference in rank and power, matters of precedence and subordination, and unquestionably where profound historical changes have taken place.[15]

Myth, in other words, acts as a cohesive force in society through its unverifiable validation of the existing state of society, by invoking supernatural sanctions for material relations. In Marxist terminology this would be described as an example of 'mystification', that is,

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[14] Myth in Primitive Psychology, pp. 23, 125.

[15] Ibid., p. 79.

'shrouding reality in mystery'. The function of myth in primitive societies as described by Malinowski is thus parallel to the function of 'ideology' as described in sociotopical literature, and we shall therefore turn to the question of the relationship between the two terms.

Many writers have simply equated the two. Thus, Clyde Kluckhohn writes that myth is merely one form of ideology. Ernst Fischer, whose definition of 'mystification' I have just quoted, considers myth to be an instance of 'mystification', and mystification is generally associated with ideology. Joseph Fontenrose also argues that 'whatever the origin of myth-telling, whatever its purpose, myths acquire an ideological character: they often provide a rationale for institutions and customs. Beliefs and creeds serve the same function'. Elsewhere, the equation between the two terms is not explicit, but has to be inferred, as in the case of Malinowski. David E. Apter also uses the two terms almost interchangeably in the course of a discussion of ideology. In successive sentences he refers to Sorel's 'myth of the proletarian general strike' and 'the ideology of the general strike'. Moreover, his description of the function of ideology is almost exactly parallel to what we have been describing as the function of myth. Ideology, according to him, has the function of 'binding the community together' and 'organizing the role personalities of the maturing individual'.[16] This may be compared with what we have been saying about the function of myth as an agent of social cohesion and as a creator of social identity.

Before proceeding further therefore, it would be in place to briefly examine the concept of ideology in sociological theory. George Lichtheim traces the concept of ideology, if not the term, as far back as Bacon's critique of the various 'idols'. In the eighteenth century Condillac used the term préjugé in a sense very similar to that of 'ideology', and the term was also used by Holbach, and by Helvetius, who argued

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[16] Kluckhohn, p. 54; Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art, p. 95; Fontenrose, The Ritual Theory of Myth, p. 58; Apter, Ideology and Discontent, pp. 18-20.

in De L'Esprit (1758) that 'our ideas are the necessary consequences of the societies in which we live'. Napoleon was the first to use the term 'idéologues' in a pejorative sense with reference to the 'ideologists' of the Institut de France, especially Antoine Destutt de Tracy, who had undertaken a 'natural history of ideas' in a positivist spirit.[17] But it is in the writings of Karl Marx that the term ideology receives its first full treatment. In a famous passage in The German Ideology Marx writes:

> In direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. . . . Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. . . . Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second it is the real, living individuals themselves, as they are in actual life, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.[18]

This has been taken by some to imply a crudely materialistic view of ideology. Taken thus, it has been opposed to Max Weber's sociological theory in which it is ideas, for example the cluster of ideas associated with Protestantism, which determine society rather than vice versa. Nigel Harris has argued that this simple dichotomy between a materialistic and an idealistic theory of ideas is too simple and points out that the differences between Marx and Max Weber are not as absolute as they are made out to be.[19] Insofar as the materialistic aspect of Marx is emphasized, however, the critique of ideology becomes a rather simple form of 'debunking' or 'unmasking'. A similar intent to debunk is evident in the familiar use of the term 'myth' in a pejorative sense.

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[17] Lichtheim, 'The Concept of Ideology', pp. 165-8.

[18] Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, edited by Lewis S. Feuer, Fontana Library (London, 1969), p. 288.

[19] Beliefs in Society, pp. 79-80.

Karl Mannheim's 'sociology of knowledge' provides a subtler perspective on the problem of ideology than the simple method of debunking. In Ideology and Utopia he distinguishes two meanings of the term, the 'particular' and the 'total'. It is the particular meaning of the term that is in focus when the method of debunking is employed and it ranges from 'conscious lies to half-conscious and unwitting disguises'. The total concept of ideology is employed with reference to the ideology of an age or group 'when we are concerned with the characteristics and composition of the total structure of the mind of this epoch or of this group'. It is this total concept of ideology that Mannheim is mainly concerned with. He traces its development from the 'philosophy of consciousness' of Kant, through Hegel and the Historical School, with their belief in the Volksgeist, to philosophies of the historical-social process, in which the concept of a homogeneous 'folk' is replaced by that of class-divisions and hence class consciousness or ideology. But though ideology is an instance of class consciousness, Mannheim maintains that it is not merely a reflection of reality, but rather helps to shape it in accordance with the interests of the group or class. In his preface to Mannheim's book Louis Wirth therefore relates the problem of objectivity raised by Mannheim to the tradition of American pragmatic philosophers like William James, Pierce, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey. As he puts it, Mannheim is concerned with how thinking 'really functions in public life and in politics as an instrument of collective action'.[20]

Since ideology is related to the interests of a class or group, it involves a distortion of reality in favour of this interest. Another mode of thinking in which there is a distortion of reality is the 'utopian' mode, and Mannheim draws a sharp distinction between ideological and utopian distortions of reality. Though both attempt to transcend the present, there is a difference of motives and effect:

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[20] pp. 49-50, 57-60, xx.

> In limiting the meaning of the term "utopia" to that type of orientation which transcends reality and which at the same time breaks the bond of the existing order, a distinction is set up between the utopian and the ideological states of mind. One can orient himself to objects that are alien to reality and which transcend actual existence -- and nevertheless still be effective in the realization and the maintenance of the existing order of things. . . . Consequently representatives of a given order have not in all cases taken a hostile attitude towards orientations transcending the existing order. Rather they have always aimed to control those situationally transcendent ideas and interests which are not realizable within the bounds of the present order, and thereby to render them socially impotent, so that such ideas would be confined to a world beyond history and society, where they could not affect the status quo.

Mannheim associates myth with ideology rather than with utopia. He maintains that myths, like fairy tales, other-worldly promises of religion, humanistic fantasies, and travel romances are examples of the wishful thinking that is always present in society. They are, he writes, 'complementary colours in the picture of the reality existing at the time than utopias working in opposition to the status quo and disintegrating it'.[21]

Ideology, then, is a distortion or transcendence of social reality at a given time in the interests of a class or group that seeks to maintain the status quo; in contrast, utopia, though it too is an 'interested' distortion of reality, serves to change society. Myth, insofar as it is concerned with contemporary problems only as transported into a timeless realm, has an ideological rather than a utopian function. This certainly harmonizes with Malinowski's view of the function of myth as a validatory and unifying force in society. He has shown how myth serves a purely conservative function in primitive society, and by extending the term to modern societies, one could describe as myth those stories, either purely fictional or based on historical figures, that serve the ideological function of conserving a given social order.

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[21] Ibid., pp. 173, 184.

In complete contrast to Mannheim, Sorel uses the term myth to refer to the activating force behind revolutionary movements. Myth, for him, is 'a means of acting on the present'. This view of myth stems from his belief that it presents an image or 'a body of images' capable of evoking sentiments which correspond to different aspects of a particular social movement, and it is these sentiments rather than purely rational considerations that impel men to social action.[22] But in a study of the relationship between 'myth' and 'ideology' as they are used in contemporary writings, Ben Halpern suggests that the apparently antithetical views of Mannheim and Sorel are so only on the surface, and that at a deeper level there is agreement between the two views. He defines this agreement thus:

> Myth, as the irrational pole of the origin and function of beliefs, is a zone of contact between irrational drives and rational communication--that is, we may add, it is an area where beliefs arise and social consensus is established; ideology, as the rational pole of the origin (moulding) and function of beliefs, is a zone of rational communication and social competition.[23]

We can define the relationship between myth and ideology not merely in terms of rationality and irrationality, as Halpern suggests, but also, and more simply, with reference to their modes of expression. Ideology is discursive, whereas myth is imaginative and narrative. Most myths have an ideological function (either conservative or revolutionary, depending upon the definition of the term we choose), but in a sense myth is prior to ideology, as Halpern argues, since imagination may be said to be prior to reason, and images and stories make their impact more immediately than ideas. Moreover, it is difficult to refute a story or image. That is why mythology is the very foundation of all religions and dogmas. Conversely, most ideologies have a myth behind them, some temporal structure of events that are supposed to have taken place

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[22] Reflections on Violence, pp. 125-7.

[23] 'Myth and Ideology in Contemporary Usage', p. 143.

in the past and which directly explain or justify (and sometimes criticize) some aspects of the present. A myth, one could say, is the narrative or imagistic structure of an ideology, the mythos behind the logos. This is the sense in which Ian Watt has used the term with reference to Robinson Crusoe. The book's popularity is explained in terms of the mythical status of the hero: as homo economicus he brings into focus the nascent ideology of economic individualism. Similarly, the 'Tudor myth' was ideological insofar as it was designed to validate the Tudor claim to the throne.

This is not, however, the sense in which the term myth is used in much of literary criticism. There it is more common to contrast myth with ideology than to insist upon their similarity of function. In this respect, literary theory of myth is comparatively untouched by anthropological and sociological thinking. John Holloway has, it is true, used some of the insights of the functionalist approach to myth, but although he discusses the possibility of relating literature in modern life with myth in primitive society with respect to their common function, this function is conceived in a purely psychological way rather than in terms of the socio-historical context. Thus, the function of literature, according to him, is to give a sense of power rather than moral values or truths; like myth, it is 'fidejussive' not explanatory.[24] But Holloway does not take account of the possibility that this sense of power that a work of art gives is not an absolute thing,but relative to the historical context.

The psychological approach to the function of myth and of mythical literature is limited by its assumption, first, of an ahistorical subject, and secondly, of an integral society. Thus, even Malinowski, who clearly recognized the ideological function of myth in primitive society, could not proceed from this to an analysis of myth in terms of its function in maintaining the privileges of a class or group; he

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[24] The Story of the Night, p. 170.

could only speak in holistic terms of social cohesion or equilibrium. In other words he is still limited by the holistic concept of the Volksgeist. Only thus could he argue for a positive function of myth in primitive society; once we realize that myth is serving to maintain the status quo (and it is always a privileged class that seeks to maintain it), the proper approach to myth should begin from a neutral attitude to the term rather than a positive one. Shakespeare has been described as a mythmaker and as drawing upon living and vital myths. Since even in primitive societies myths have an ideological function, it would be surprising if he were mythical purely by virtue of his relation to an 'organic' community. It should be useful, therefore, to examine the ideological functions of his myths. Unfortunately this kind of 'myth-criticism' has not attracted many critics, as will be evident from the paucity of material for Chapter 10.

Myths serve an ideological function directly and usually unconsciously. But even when they cease to do so, they retain their mythical status so long as ideological exegesis of them is possible. Shakespeare perhaps still has a mythical value in English culture (he is, after all, the first major poet, and the greatest, to give expression to the sentiments of English nationalism). So long as he has this mythical status, ideological interpretations will always be possible. These interpretations in their turn sustain, and even increase, the status of the work. A myth gives imaginative expression to an ideology. But precisely because it is an imaginative expression there are bound to be differences over what that ideology is, since to discover it involves translating its imaginative form into a discursive one. The ideology discovered might therefore be as much the ideology of the interpreter as of the mythmaker. It should be useful, therefore, to examine the ideology behind the myth criticism of Shakespeare.

It is clear that the sociological approach to myth is not very popular among literary critics. The term myth, with all its associations

of the 'primitive', which, in its turn, is easily assimilated to the 'universal', seems to absolve them of the necessity of any socio-historical explanation. Many critics are at pains to emphasize the universality of myth. Along with this goes the tendency to stress all other extraneous aspects of literature -- the moral, the affective, the religious -- without ever mentioning the socio-historical context. Northrop Frye's whole elaborate scheme in the Anatomy of Criticism seems to be designed to disinfect literature of all taint of social concern and historical origin. Elsewhere he writes that the function of what he calls 'generic criticism' is to enable the structural critic (who is said to be concerned 'with such matters as myth and ritual') to get clear of the 'tyranny of historical categories'.[25] Insofar as this refers to dreary histories of genres one is prepared to go along with it. But usually the desire to escape barren historicism goes with a refusal to consider a cultural creation in relation to its society and time. The myth critic seems to be trying to get away from the 'tyranny' of history only in order to be able to contemplate the world of struggling mortals from the serenity of Olympian heights. It is generally agreed that mythical thought has no sense of history; it can conceive of the absolute past and the eternal present but not the relative past of history. It seems obvious, therefore, that the popularity of myth in contemporary criticism is related to anti-historicism. Such anti-historicism usually goes with a certain 'elegiac Toryism' of which the following passage from Mircea Eliade may be taken as representative. Eliade is writing about the distrust of history that is characteristic of primitive societies:

> It is not our part to decide whether such motives were puerile or not, or whether such a refusal of history always proved efficacious. In our opinion, only one fact counts: by virtue of this view, tens of millions of men were able, for century after century, to endure great historical pressures without despairing; without committing suicide or falling into that spiritual aridity that always brings with it a relativistic or nihilistic view of history.[26]

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[25] 'A Conspectus of Dramatic Genres', p. 544.

[26] The Myth of the Eternal Return, p. 152.

I do not think that it is only a Marxist or materialist who ought to gasp at this in astonishment. All the ills of modern society attributed to a barren 'historicism' and all the sustaining power of traditional societies to their mythical attitude! Not a word about the material conditions of life in modern industrialized societies, just a yearning for the eternal recurrence of the same! Eliade is, I gather, very popular and influential among literary critics, and the reason is not far to seek. He has the same comforting analysis of the ills of modern society that, for example, Wheelwright puts forward, or, for that matter, Eliot. Just start believing in a transcendental reality, a realm of the sacred, a myth, and all the ills of the society will be taken care of. Frye does not ask even that much. Literal faith is not necessary; all we have to do is to contemplate the total mythology of man and feel reverential. It is a rather donnish solution, to say the least.

Discussing the social function of the arts, Frye writes that it 'seems to be closely connected with visualizing the goal of work in human life. So in terms of significance, the central myth of art must be the vision of the end of social effort, the innocent world of fulfilled desires, the free human society'.[27] On the face of it this seems to ascribe to art a 'utopian' function in Mannheim's sense of the term, but it does not take into account the possibility that this 'vision' of the ideal life can serve as well to maintain the <u>status quo</u> in this world, leaving the world of fulfilled desires in the lap of the almighty. Whether it is 'ideological' in this sense or really 'utopian' will depend on its precise content and its historical context. And a theory which does not recognize this has to be called 'ideological', even though the ideology be as attractive and liberal as Frye's.

The point can be clarified by approaching it from a slightly different angle. Frye insists upon the autonomy of art, and his theory is intended to establish criticism as an autonomous discipline. So long

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[27] <u>Fables of Identity</u>, p. 18.

as the autonomy is insisted upon for pedagogic and methodological reasons it is understandable. But very often behind the cry for autonomy (though perhaps this does not apply to Frye) there is a desire to be left alone, not to be interfered with, to let things remain as they are. Is that why, as Frederick Crews suggests, the whole field of American studies 'is taciturn about such themes as racism, imperialism, and monopoly, but eloquent about myths, motifs, and morals -- the Fulbrighter's stock-in-trade'?[28] Once we begin discussing myth in its subjective aspects, as in this chapter, or in Chapter 3, there is no alternative but to apply the same principles to the students of myths as to the creators. If myth implies an ideology, so does myth-criticism.

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[28]'Do Literary Studies Have an Ideology', p. 424.

PART II

CHAPTER 6

SHAKESPEARE IN THE LIGHT OF ALLEGORICAL MYTHOGRAPHY

In this chapter I propose to survey those interpretations of the works of Shakespeare which can be seen within the framework of the allegorical theory of myth as described in Chapter 1. Such criticism usually takes the form of tracing certain universal patterns or themes in individual works. The term 'myth and ritual pattern' refers to one of these closely related themes or patterns. The commonest of these is that of the life of a god or hero who is born under exceptional circumstances, has many adventures, dies, and is finally reborn. This is broadly the 'myth and ritual' pattern as described by Herbert Weisinger in his book Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall (1953). Weisinger suggests that this pattern, more simply the pattern of death and rebirth, has exercised a peculiar fascination on the imagination of man from very early times. He further suggests that its development can be traced from its genesis in ancient seasonal rituals, through the myths of the Near-East, including the myths of Christianity, to its culmination in the tragedies of Shakespeare and others.[1] The myth and ritual approach is described by Weisinger as the application of this pattern to an individual work to see how far it corresponds to the original in its form and emotional content.

Closely associated with the death-rebirth pattern are the patterns of separation and reunion or reconciliation, the loss and regaining of paradise, and the seasonal cycle. Yet another related pattern is that of initiation rituals, in which the initiate suffers a temporary loss of identity before acquiring a new one. The loss of identity (like the loss of paradise) is often symbolized by death and the

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[1] p. 10; see also Lord Raglan, The Hero, pp. 178-9.

regaining of it, by rebirth. The central myth of Christianity -- the death and resurrection of Christ -- is also obviously related. It is this cluster of themes and patterns that is implied by the term 'the myth and ritual pattern'. In fact, Weisinger uses the term to refer to practically any criticism which sees the theme of 'reconciliation' in the plays.[2] Following his example, I shall include in this chapter studies of the works in terms of any of the patterns just mentioned, even when there is no explicit reference to myth or to any anthropological theory.

I hope to show that interpretations of Shakespeare in terms of any of these patterns can be better understood when seen in the context of the allegorical-typological tradition of the exegesis of classical myths and the Bible. This is especially so because some of this 'myth criticism' actually precedes Frazer and other anthropologists. Briefly, interpretation of mythology within this tradition consisted, as I indicated in Chapter 1, in identifying a wide variety of mythical and biblical figures and then interpreting the composite figure allegorically. Syncretism was a marked feature of such interpretations and remains a feature of this kind of myth criticism as well. The critics also take up the task of identification with gay abandon, only they extend their field to include fictional characters as well as the mythical and biblical ones.

The actual content of this kind of myth criticism, the pattern or theme that is discerned beneath the variety of literary and mythic materials, also derives from pre-Frazerian sources. For example, the pattern of the seasonal rituals of renewal and of the myths associated with them does not vary very significantly from the pattern of 'solar mythology', the seasonal cycle being, after all, a function of the solar rounds. Even more importantly, the theme of rebirth has been central to esoteric cults from early times down to the present.

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[2]See 'Myth, Method, and Shakespeare', pp. 40ff.

The connexions between myth, allegory, typology, esotericism, and syncretism is brought out very clearly in the work of W.F.C. Wigston, whose book A New Study of Shakespeare first appeared in 1884. E.A.J. Honigmann has rightly pointed out the pioneering role of Wigston with respect to myth criticism of The Winter's Tale,[3] but I believe that Wigston's role turns out to be even more crucial than he suggests if we consider his contribution to the criticism of the final plays as a whole and to myth criticism generally. I shall have occasion to return to Wigston frequently during the discussion of the individual plays. Here I would like to quote at length a passage where he states his general theory:

> The secret knowledge, or Gnosis, had never been extinguished during the dark ages, and in this profound fact we have an explanation of much that would otherwise perplex and embarrass us. One of the vehicles of this Gnosis was the form of popular tales, with an allegorical meaning well understood by the initiated . . .
>
> The habit of finding personal allegories in every metaphysical poem of the 16th and 17th centuries, is pernicious and absurd. The study of the classics, of Plato, and the ancient philosophers, had given rise to great subtlety of deductive thought, which is to be found not only in all the sonneteers of the period, but in secret societies, who seem undoubtedly to have renewed touch with the opinions, sentiments, and mysteries of the ancient world prior to the corruption of Christianity. We find the society of the Rosicrucians arising suddenly into notice, about the beginning of the 17th century. A study of the Hermetic philosophy, as far as we can gather, certainly suggests that this strange brotherhood and its kindred allies, had anticipated much of the results of modern critical inquiry. For example, a study of Sir George Cox's Mythology of the Aryan Nations, leaves us as result, the essence of the old Iranian dualism, in the conflict of Light and Darkness, of Day and Night, as the protagonists of most of the ancient mythology. This conflict of Light and Darkness seems however to have formed one of the leading doctrines of the Rosicrucians and Hermetic Brethren. The learned authoress of Isis Unveiled, tells us that with the exposure of the mythical nature of Christianity, a return to the Hermetic philosophy is certain.

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[3] See the section on The Winter's Tale below.

In another passage, where he is discussing The Tempest in particular, Wigston writes:

> We confess that (to ourselves) it seems highly possible that Miranda (the Marvel), is no less than the daughter of Ceres and Jupiter (Prospero), viz., Proserpine, -- we mean the spiritual life of the poet's art, -- asleep under power of his spells, -- a type of the resurrection and rebirth of this art promised through the wooing of Ferdinand -- ourselves (?). If so, the introduction of this classical vision or masque, is a revelation in itself. Ceres is summoned, to preside over the marriage of her daughter. And this Midsummer or August vision, is the crowning self-reflecting portrait of the poet's art, come full circle, -- its Winter (crowned with new life), become Summer! Then in Miranda, we have Perdita and Marina again, under a fresh aspect. And the profound student will mark the sleep that Prospero puts Miranda under. A sleep that is not difficult to understand, if this be the sleep of Persephone in Hades, viz., the sleep of the Winter's Tale, the poet's entire art, slumbering during the Winter of its uninterpretation.[4]

Most of the characteristics of myth criticism can be observed here. There is, first of all, the conviction that the individual work under consideration is of profound significance; secondly, that this significance is hidden or esoteric rather than explicit or exoteric; and thirdly, that this significance is shared by the myths and rituals of the past. The association of syncretism and esotericism is also clearly brought out. Especially noteworthy is the application of the term 'mythical' to Christianity. Wigston also gives an interesting twist to the rebirth theme, suggesting that it hints at the discovery of the true meaning of Shakespeare (by faithful Rosicrucians like himself) after nearly two centuries of 'uninterpretation'. He seems to cast himself in the role of the priest in a mystery cult, 'revealing' the hidden meaning of the cult symbols to the initiate. In fact the word 'revelation' and its derivatives appear very frequently in the book. Also recurrent are the themes of rebirth, the seasonal cycle, and reconciliation -- which are the stock-in-trade of the myth and ritual approach.

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[4] A New Study of Shakespeare, pp. 190-2, 326. All subsequent references to Wigston are to this book, unless otherwise specified.

Apart from criticism which applies any of the myth and ritual patterns to the individual work, I have included in this chapter some psychoanalytical interpretations of the works for reasons already mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 1. I shall elaborate further upon them during the discussion of the individual plays.

Finally, I have also included some criticism which seems to be concerned merely with pointing out parallels between the plays, or parts of them, and motifs from myths, folk tales, and fairy tales. The critics seem to have merely an antiquarian interest in drawing these parallels, without any theoretical framework within which they could be meaningful. But such studies often prepare the ground for theoretically more important work. Besides, taken collectively such pointing out of parallels cannot but modify our response to the plays. Broadly speaking, myth criticism, taken in its most general sense as the mere drawing of analogies between the plays and mythic or folk material, may result in two kinds of approaches, both of them anti-naturalistic. One approach seeks to emphasize the depth-psychology aspect of the plays rather than the surface psychology of character that we find in the criticism of Bradley; the other approach seeks to deny psychology altogether and to examine the plays in terms of conventions. An example of the former approach is J. I. M. Stewart, as Northrop Frye is of the latter. But the nature of Shakespeare's 'primitiveness' either in Stewart's sense or Frye's will not be the subject-matter of this chapter. Frye's criticism will be examined in Chapter 9 and the criticism of Shakespeare in the light of theories about a mythical or primitive mode of thought in Chapter 8.

Myth and ritual criticism has been applied not merely to individual plays but also to the spiritual development of Shakespeare as inferred from the works. Weisinger, for example, as pointed out earlier, cites G. Wilson Knight's map of Shakespeare's spiritual development 'from spiritual pain and despairing thought through stoic acceptance to a

serene and mystic joy' as an instance of the myth and ritual approach, though he also admits that this pattern is not really very different from Dowden's 'map' of Shakespeare's progress from apprenticeship in the 'workshop', through experience of the world and tragic gloom, to the final serenity 'on the height'.[5] However, if we accept Weisinger, we will have to consider Knight's role in myth and ritual criticism as crucial. But I would like to suggest that his influence has been of a general kind rather than related to the criticism of individual plays in terms of specific myths. His chief contribution to the myth and ritual approach lies, I suggest, in his concept of the plays as myths, myths being understood as embodiments of transcendental intuitions of reality, and in the popularizing of the rebirth pattern in a language relatively free from the esoteric jargon that we find in Wigston.

The Comedies

The genre of comedy was related to the pattern of seasonal rituals of renouveau by Cornford in his The Origin of Attic Comedy (1914). Even when not approached from the angle of anthropology, the relation of comedy to the myth and ritual pattern is obvious. Since two of the key ideas in this pattern are rebirth and reconciliation, and since comedy ends on a note of some kind of reconciliation after a period of confusion, it is believed by some critics to be nearest to the ideal pattern. Northrop Frye, in particular, has written about the 'comic myth' in this sense. Many other critics, as I try to show in the rest of this chapter, also discern the mythic pattern in Shakespeare's comedies, all comedies being concerned, in some sense, with loss or confusion and reconciliation. An important conclusion that can be drawn from the myth criticism of the comedies is that they are continuous with the last plays, the same individual mythic and folk motifs as well as the same broad pattern emerging in both groups of plays.

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[5] See pp. 3-4 above. The reference to Dowden is on p. 48 of the article cited there.

The relation of comedy to the Christian myth is also obvious, as is indicated by the title of the Divine Comedy. The history of the world viewed in the perspective of Christian eschatology is a comedy because of the faith that the power of Satan and death will ultimately be quelled and Man will regain the lost paradise.

The Comedy of Errors

I have discovered only one example of mythical-cum-allegorical interpretation of this play, though no doubt there could be many, since the pattern of loss and reconciliation is present in this play as much as in any of the later romances. Jean Paris (1960), employing some ideas of Paul Arnold, interprets the play in the light of Rosicrucian and other esoteric doctrine. Briefly, his thesis (which is anticipated by Wigston) is that in the Renaissance there was a flowering of occult doctrine and that occultism and the theatre were closely connected then, as indeed they have been throughout history. In this connexion he mentions the popularity of Alchemy and the introduction of Rosicrucian doctrine into England around this time. Esotericism he defines generally as a 'quest for the absolute'. Cabalistic doctrine in particular holds that in the beginning there was absolute unity -- Ain Soph. A series of divisions in this unity, beginning with the division between the masculine and the feminine principles -- the voluntas and the noluntas -- was the source of all creation. The goal of life should be the reattainment of the original unity.[6]

Paris sees a reflection of this doctrine in The Comedy of Errors. The cities at war at the beginning of the play symbolize the first rupture of unity. The story, he writes, 'relates a sense of disasters, each of which seems marked by the rupture of a couple'. The action thus parallels, in the realm of human affairs, the progress of the universe as described in Hesiod's Theogony. Thus this comedy, which is one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, 'contains the basic pattern of his entire theatre'. The

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[6] William Shakespeare, pp. 94-5.

divorce between the masculine and the feminine is found again in Pericles, As You Like It, A Midsummer-Night's Dream (described as 'the New Comedy of Errors' by Paul Reyher), Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest (?). In The Two Gentlemen of Verona also M. Paris sees 'a real initiative method' reflected in the pattern of separation and then union and regeneration.[7]

The relation of this interpretation to the concept of myth is obvious. The Theogany and The Comedy of Errors, as well as Alchemical and Rosicrucian theory and practice, all represent the one 'timeless theme' of unity, division, and reunion, of death and rebirth, of fall and regeneration. It is also obvious that the Rosicrucian (and Cabalistic) doctrine itself, with its idea of a primal unity, division, and then reunion, has behind it a story which shares this pattern with a large number of myths from a variety of cultures. In other words, behind the doctrine of Rosicrucianism itself is a myth.

Although they do not invoke esoteric doctrine, other critics have also come to similar conclusions about the play. Thus, G. Wilson Knight sees the play as representing the pattern of birth, 'the dispersal of a family in tempest, and then a final reunion'. And although he believes that there is less of 'religious and mythical suggestion' in this play than in Pericles (with which he compares it), he still maintains that Ephesus is presented as a land of supernatural mystery. Northrop Frye describes the structure of the play as a 'metamorphosis structure' of 'descent into illusion and emergence into recognition'. This, we might remark, was the pattern of many initiation rituals, in which the initiate has to undergo a period of wandering in the wilderness before the mystery could be imparted to him. The 'errors' or illusions through which the characters in the play pass thus correspond to 'the labyrinth of the wilderness of error' of the Eleusinian mysteries, of which Christ's wandering in the wilderness is the Christian counterpart. It is

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[7] Ibid., p. 97.

interesting in this connexion that Northrop Frye comments upon the 'curiously eerie' atmosphere of Adriana's melancholy, the insistence on madness, and the repeated references to jugglers and wizards. He also contrasts Shakespeare's treatment of Antipholus with Plautus's, arguing that Shakespeare's Antipholus enters the house of his brother's wife 'with almost the feeling of being initiated into a mystery'. If this is accepted, and if the doubling of the identical twins works, as Frye argues, not to turn the Plautine comedy into complete farce, but rather to suggest 'the primitive fear of the doppelgänger', then a case can be made out for taking the play as representing something deeper than a mere entertaining farce.[8]

The Taming of the Shrew

I have not seen any interpretation of this play in terms of myth, but there are several studies of it relating it to folk tale and to other forms of folk art and ritual.[9] William Barry Thorne relates the play to Elizabethan folk drama by bringing out the common 'Saturnalian pattern of misrule' in both of them, as well as the theme of 'the struggle between the young and the old'. This article can be more appropriately discussed in the next chapter. Here it would suffice to note the emphasis on the theme of the struggle between the generations as well as on the contrast between summer and winter, to which also Thorne draws attention. G. Wilson Knight discerns a tempest-music dualism in this play also, and he relates this to the struggle between bestiality and spirituality in man.[10] This is very much in the manner of allegorizing on the basis of the analogy between the microcosm and the macrocosm that we noticed

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[8] Knight, The Shakespearian Tempest, p. 120; Frye, A Natural Perspective, pp. 77-8, 106-7. For a discussion of the wandering in the wilderness as a part of the Eleusinian mysteries, see Colin Still, The Timeless Theme, pp. 97ff.

[9] See for example the entries under J. H. Brunvand and E. M. W. Tillyard in the Bibliography.

[10] Thorne, 'Folk Elements in The Taming of the Shrew', pp. 483, 490; Knight, op.cit., pp. 103-12.

in Chapter 1 as one of the common features of the allegorical approach to myth. What excludes it from the category of the more obvious type of myth criticism is the absence of analogies with any particular myth or myths.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

An obvious interpretation of this play would be in terms of the Proteus myth, and this is what William O. Scott has done in an article written in 1965. The assumption in this article, unlike in many other examples of analogizing with myth, is that Shakespeare is using the myth of Proteus consciously to give a deeper significance to the character of Proteus and hence to the play as a whole. Thus, the allusion to the myth of Proteus is more than mere ornamentation or rhetorical flourish. Scott argues that in the mythography of the Renaissance Proteus is seen in three aspects: as shape-shifter, as a type of lust, and as 'a type of nature or the truth of things obscured by material appearance'. Shakespeare's Proteus is like this mythical figure, and the use of myth helps to suggest 'an underlying reality of character which will remain after the fickleness, and its resultant treacheries, have been purged away'. In fact, he argues, the theme of identity implied in the Proteus myth is the subject of the play. The redeeming heroine brings her man to a true concept of himself. 'If Proteus can be bound firmly, he holds his true shape.'[11]

Scott thus sees Shakespeare as using a myth to give shape and significance to his play somewhat in the manner of the use of myth in, say, The Waste Land. William Godshalk has similarly commented upon the structural function of myth in this play, but his essay is perhaps better considered in Chapter 9.

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[11] 'Proteus in Spenser and Shakespeare', esp. pp. 284-5, 291.

Love's Labour's Lost

Wigston argues that 'the author of Love's Labour's Lost is more than an erudite writer. He writes with direct and plenary inspiration, with knowledge of rites pertaining to certain classic Mysteries, which the learned can discover for themselves'. His theory is, as he puts it, 'to connect the poet's art with the cycle of the seasons, in connection with the mysteries'. Associated with the cycle of the seasons is the theme of rebirth, and Wigston argues that this is suggested in the following lines:

> Long. Berowne is like an envious sneaping frost
> That bites the first-born infants of the spring.
>
> Ber. Well, say I am ; why should proud summer boast
> Before the birds have any cause to sing?
> Why should I joy in any abortive birth?
> (I. 1. 100)

Berowne, he goes on to argue, suggests Apollo, and the show of the Nine Worthies is said to be 'the greatest mystery of all the poet's plays'. Rosaline, according to Wigston (who constantly refers to her as Rosalind), represents the Ephesian Diana because she is described as 'black'. The Ephesian Diana is none other than the Great Mother Earth herself in her underground darkness. Wigston mentions in this connexion the Aryan mythology of George Cox, which revolves round the conflict of light and darkness.[12]

It is worth pointing out that in spite of the eccentricity of parts of Wigston's analysis, his bringing together of the themes of the seasonal cycle, death and rebirth, and the mysteries anticipates many aspects of the myth and ritual approach as practised by later critics. Besides, it is obvious that the theme of the seasons is there in the play, as much as in The Winter's Tale, and it is not prima facie absurd to link this

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[12] Wigston, pp. 296-7, 343. See also his Bacon, Shakespeare, and the Rosicrucians, pp. 130-2. Line references are given throughout to the Tudor edition of Shakespeare, edited by Peter Alexander (London, 1964).

with the theme of rebirth and with the significance of the mysteries of classical and later times. I hope it will be increasingly evident as we proceed with our documentation that, as already pointed out, the larger proportion of the examples of the so-called myth and ritual approach does not owe as much to Frazer and the anthropologists as to the tradition of myth interpretation which we traced in Chapter 1, a tradition often connected with esoteric cults or with various syncretistic movements, as well as with the allegorical-cum typological exegesis of the Bible. What writers like Frazer and Jane Harrison did was to bring out into the open the significance of esoteric cults like the Eleusinian mysteries. It would be a nice point to determine to what extent their own interest in and interpretations of geographically or historically primitive, esoteric or exoteric rituals were influenced by their need for an experience that could be religious without being related to the dogma of Christianity. It is not surprising that it is cults which can be described as Dionysiac, even when not specifically associated with Dionysus, which attracted Frazer as well as Jane Harrison, for the Dionysiac cults offer experience rather than dogma and are, moreover, reconcilable with the central myth and ritual of Christianity. The Dying God looms large over the Golden Bough, and Jane Harrison could barely conceal her contempt for the Apollonian deities.

A Midsummer-Night's Dream

Some of the earliest uses of the word 'myth' (or 'mythology') in criticism of Shakespeare occur in connexion with A Midsummer-Night's Dream. This play has been a favourite among folklorists, and one of them, W. J. Thoms (who was in fact the man who coined the term 'folk-lore') wrote on the subject of Shakespeare's use of folklore in this play. The word myth appears more frequently in the form of its derivative, 'mythology', usually qualified by the adjective 'fairy'. Thus James O. Halliwell (later Halliwell-Phillips) wrote in 1841 that Shakespeare 'formed his beautiful creations out of the popular fairy

mythology of the age'.[13] Much of the folklore criticism of Shakespeare is not, however, very relevant to our purpose since it is concerned merely with pointing out the folklore elements (also referred to as 'popular mythology' or 'fairy mythology'). One writer, for example, traces some elements in the plays to Aryan folklore and mythology dealing with natural phenomena. The evidence adduced is largely etymological, although a few instances of actual folk customs are also mentioned. To cite an example, the elves in the play are held to be descendants of certain creatures in Aryan mythology called Ribhus, which meant sunbeams. Hence the nature of the elves in Shakespeare, which partake, like the sunbeams, 'of the shifting and unstable character of aerial phenomena'. The word 'nightmare' is traced back to the Sanskrit Marut which refers to the mythical personification of clouds as demons continually changing shapes.[14] Such examples of 'solar' mythologizing are more than mere tracing of etymologies in one respect; their aim is to suggest, not merely that many words used by Shakespeare have origins going back to Aryan mythology (so, after all, have many other words even in contemporary usage) but rather to suggest that Shakespeare uses these words with some awareness of their mythic 'resonance'. And insofar as such studies can help us to recapture this resonance in words which have become dead metaphors, they can be said to be a useful contribution.

Some other discussions of the folklore of A Midsummer-Night's Dream can be more appropriately discussed in the next chapter since

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[13] Halliwell, An Introduction to Shakespeare's 'Midsummer-Night's Dream' (London, 1841), p. 23. See also W.J. Thoms, Three Notelets on Shakespeare (London, 1859?); W. Bell, Shakespeare's Puck and his Folklore, 3 vols (London, 1852-1864). Bell relates Puck to the 'universal Deity Bog (whence the purely Eastern god Bacchus)', II, 343-4. See also the New Variorum edition of the play (1895), reprinted (New York, 1963), p. 307.

[14] Arthur S. Way, 'Relics of Ancient Aryan Folk-lore in Shakespeare', esp. pp. 261, 265.

they attempt to relate the play to actual folk customs and rituals of the Elizabethan Age. Here I would like to mention four studies of the play. Wigston relates this play also to the mysteries, but this time with special reference to the doctrine of idealism which he sees the play as setting forth. After stating that the mysteries 'were in effect an allegorical death and rebirth', he asks rhetorically: 'Is the Midsummer-Night's Dream derived from Virgil's VIth Book, which has profound connection with Plato's idealism, as taught in the Mysteries? Is this art, in short, the Mysteries themselves?' Wigston relates the mystic doctrine of idealism with the 'Buddhist' concept of Maya (illusion), and sees a further confirmation of his theory about the relation of the play to the mysteries in the fact that the boy who is the cause of the quarrel between Oberon and Titania is of Indian origin. He suggests that this boy might be Bacchus-Dionysus himself, who also was believed to have come originally from India.[15]

I would like to digress very briefly here to comment on a characteristic feature of Wigston's style. One finds on almost every page passages in which there is a piling up of interrogative and exclamatory sentences and italicized clauses. The impression that this gives is one of tremendous intellectual excitement -- as though some initiate were being led to the revelation of the ultimate mystery by the initiating priest. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> It is a question whether Shakespeare's enchanted isle of Prospero, is not one of the fortunate islands raised above the sea -- viz., the islands of the blessed -- of the emancipated soul -- that is, of truth and light (see Olympiodorus in his MSS. Commentary on the Gorgias of Plato) ? . . . It is in relationship to his art, that Prospero makes his sublime speech. What art is this? Does this mean nothing (unless a portrait of something profounder), or is this "art" the entire art of the plays and their creative principles?[16]

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[15] Wigston, pp. 313-17.

[16] Ibid., p. 324.

That ungrammatical mark of interrogation after the first sentence is symptomatic. Curiously enough, we find similar features in Colin Still. Note for example the typographical eccentricities of the passage quoted from him earlier (see p. 28 above). All the resources of language and the press seem to be required to convey with sufficient urgency the truth and profundity of the ideas being propagated. There is just a hint of paranoia about it all.

Sinclair Korner interprets the play in terms of Max Muller's 'solar mythology' in an article written in 1891. It is a rather impressionistic essay, concerned with little more than pointing out the solar references in the play, very much, I would like to suggest, in the manner of some modern studies of 'imagery'. In modern critical jargon the essay could be described as a study of the 'sun-image' in the play. Korner suggests that both Hippolyta and Theseus are solar figures. Hippolyta's name means 'horse-woman', and the horse is a familiar symbol for the sun. Korner also mentions a myth in which Hippolyta is given away by Hercules (another solar figure) to his kinsman Theseus, 'who is an Athenian parallel of the Teutonic Sifrit, a renowned sun-champion'. Theseus, in mythology, is 'the offspring of brightness and radiance'. The Indian boy also features in this solar interpretation of the play because, as Korner points out, 'from the brightest and sunniest region where men dwell, she [Titania] carries away a choice victim to the shadowy underworld, or to roam about in her train beneath the subdued beams of the moon'. In conclusion, Korner describes the play as 'a beautiful mosaic of old-world myth and modern folk-lore' in which 'the solar element is as pronounced as in the poems of Homer'.[17] The solar theme in the play is again taken up by Cambillard and Jean Paris, as will be shown shortly.

In The Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare (1900), Alfred Nutt argues that in this play Shakespeare has managed to synthesize two

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[17] 'Solar Myth in A Midsummer-Night's Dream'.

strands of fiction: Arthurian romance (to which belongs the figure of Oberon) and peasant belief (in Puck or Robin Goodfellow). He traces the origin of Puck to certain Irish deities called the Tuatha de Danann, who were fertility spirits with the attributes of both gods and mischievous spirits. They are thus the link between the Oberon of Arthurian romance and the folk figure of Puck. Shakespeare's association of the two is not, therefore, according to Nutt, arbitrary. It brings out the fact of the common mythology of the 'Aryan speaking people of Europe'. Nutt also maintains that the deities whose different transformations are presented by Shakespeare as Oberon and Puck were associated with cults related to agriculture. In thus relating the fairies of Shakespeare with gods of fertility and agriculture, Nutt finds himself in agreement with the 'chief recent students of myth and rite in Britain and the continent'. Once again, then, we find the idea of rebirth associated with myth, for, as Nutt argues, the Celtic doctrine of rebirth (which was the subject of his earlier book, The Voyage of Bran) and the cults associated with it had an agricultural basis, as indeed had ancient mythology. Puck and Oberon are therefore to be seen as fertility spirits, as personifications of the dying and reborn vegetation god. A reference to Nashe clinches the point. According to Nashe, as quoted by Nutt, elves and Robin Goodfellow are the same as the fauns and satyrs of Greek mythology, and these latter were, of course, associated with Dionysus, the god of growth and vegetation.[18]

Nutt's discussion of the origin of the fairies of Shakespeare is important because of his associating them with the mythical gods whose life-histories form the myth and ritual pattern. Nutt does not, however, concern himself with the mythical pattern of the play as a whole, and in this he is closer to the antiquarian folklorists of the nineteenth century than to the myth critics of the twentieth.

In an article in Études Anglaises (1939), C. Cambillard

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[18] Nutt, p. 25, front and back inside covers.

interprets the play as an astrological myth. Briefly, his interpretation is as follows. Titania represents the moon, which at the beginning of the play is said to be in her last quarter, that is, in her most pernicious phase. She also represents the female principle, microcosmically as well as macrocosmically. Oberon represents the sun as well as the male principle. The Indian Boy is spiritual energy, which is symbolized in Alchemy by Mercury. The problem of the play is to restore the child to Oberon, spiritual energy to the male principle. Only thus can the energy of the child be directed towards growth and fertility. In association with the moon in its destructive last quarter, the child can only have a baleful influence, as at the beginning of the play.[19] Cambillard goes into more complicated astrological and alchemical details, but the outline of his interpretation follows a familiar pattern: he too sees the play as moving from disorder and infertility to harmony and fertility, these latter being symbolized by marriage.

Jean Paris in the book referred to above brings out clearly this pattern, which is only implicit in Cambillard. He refers to the Orphic mysteries celebrated under the new moon and suggests that the play itself may be dealing with such a mystery. He writes:

> This moon (i.e. the new moon), under whose sign the final scene of The Merchant of Venice unfolds, reveals the cosmic mechanism of initiation in A Midsummer-Night's Dream. It reappears at various intervals to illuminate, as the tale progresses, the path of those in search of the absolute. Described as 'waning' in the opening scene, it will complete a full cycle, from death to resurrection, toward that new moon which will sanctify the marriage of the King and Queen.

Paris also compares the 'sterility' in Theseus's kingdom at the beginning of the play with the sterility in the castle of Amfortas in the Fisher-king legend. The earth, he suggests, is represented at the beginning of the play as 'suffering from some sort of curse', under the baleful influence of the old moon. But finally the sun dispels the gloom cast by this old

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[19] 'Le Songe D'Une Nuit D'Été: Thème Astrologique', esp. pp. 119-22.

moon and the characters return to celebrate 'the redeeming marriage and bury the old moon as an effigy is burnt at Mardi Gras'.[20] We see in this interpretation a neat synthesis of esoteric lore with seasonal myth and ritual.

The Merchant of Venice

The Merchant of Venice has elicited a fair amount of commentary within the framework of myth and ritual, especially those rituals connected with the driving out of the scapegoat. Some of these studies are best discussed in the next chapter, although in practice it is difficult to draw the line between those studies employing the allegorical theory of myth and those employing the ritual theory. The play has also interested psychoanalysts (largely because of Freud's brief remarks on the play) and Christian interpreters.

The fairy-tale, ultimately mythic, sources of the two plots in the play, namely, the three-caskets and the pound-of-flesh, have been commented upon by several writers, including Freud.[21] Freud himself refers to a writer who sees an 'astral myth' in the play, in other words, an astronomical allegory. The writer is E. Stucken, from whose book Astralmythen der Hebraeer, Babylonier und Aegypter (1907), Freud quotes the following:

> The identity of Portia's three suitors is clear from their choice: the Prince of Morocco chooses the gold casket -- he is the sun; the Prince of Arragon chooses the silver casket -- he is the moon; Bassanio chooses the leaden casket -- he is the star youth.

Stucken also mentions an episode from an Estonian folk-epic 'Kapewipoeg' in which the three suitors appear undisguisedly as the sun, moon and star youths (the last being 'the Pole-star's eldest boy'), and here too the

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[20] Shakespeare, pp. 106-9.

[21] See, e.g., Hermann Sinsheimer, Shylock : The History of a Character or the Myth of the Jew (1947); Theodor Reik, The Secret Self (1952); Erica Spivakovsky, 'The Shylock Myth' (1960).

bride is won by the third suitor.[22]

In Chapter 1 I suggested that many psychoanalytical and Jungian interpretations of myths, rituals, and literary works can best be considered within the category of allegorical criticism. The method of such interpretations of literary works is first of all to point out analogies between the work under discussion and folk and fairy tales and myths from a wide range of cultures. A common psychological interpretation of all these analogous works is then given. The analogy with myth is important in such interpretations because, as the most primitive (phylogenetically) of the analogues, myth can be taken as expressing as clearly as possible, with the least distortion, the most 'primitive' aspects of our psyches. These aspects, which are obscured in the more sophisticated literary versions, are, nevertheless, really what all the various analogous stories, literary as well as folk and mythic, are trying to express symbolically.

Psychoanalytic interpretations are related to allegory in another way. In the allegorical theories of myth that we considered in the first chapter, the reason why myths were allegorical was supposed to be because the sacred truths that they contained were too precious, too full of mana, to be exposed to the comprehension of the uninitiated. The allegory was supposed, in a way, to be divinely sanctioned. In psychoanalytic theory this view of allegory is naturalized and humanized. Allegory is no longer divinely sanctioned, but rather the 'natural language of the unconscious' by which consciousness is protected from disturbing truths. In many of the writings of Freud and Jung on literary subjects these disturbing truths seem to be invested, nevertheless, with the quality of the sacral that earlier mythologers found in ancient myths. This quality of the sacral, I would like to suggest, is as much a function of the style of writing as of the nature of the truths conveyed. Much of psychoanalytical criticism fails to convey this sense of the sacral and is in this respect the reverse of 'myth criticism'. This is, generally

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[22]Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', pp. 291-2.

speaking, less true of Jungian interpretations, because the Jungians hold the view that myths are, far from being the expressions of primitive infantilism, 'the most mature expressions of that young humanity', and also because they emphasize the 'numinosity' of archetypes.[23] (For 'numinosity' we can substitute mana.) Among Freudian interpretations, those studies dealing with the relations of a particular work to its author's life and experiences fail to evoke those 'resonances' (to introduce a word which I shall use frequently and comment upon at the end of this chapter) that are characteristic of myth criticism of the type with which we are concerned in this chapter. Besides, they make little use of the concept of myth and are thus irrelevant to our discussion. But it is precisely these resonances that Freud manages to evoke very effectively in his famous essay 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913) to which I have already referred. As it is in part a discussion of The Merchant of Venice, I shall turn to it now.

Freud brings out very clearly both the differences and the similarities between psychoanalytical and the then still popular allegorical theories of myth (like solar and astral theories) in his comments on Stucken's interpretation of the three-caskets story. After referring to Stucken's discovery of an astral myth in the story, he writes:

> The only pity is that with this explanation we are not at the end of the matter. The question is not exhausted, for we do not share the belief of some investigators that myths were read in the heavens and brought down to earth; we are more inclined to judge with Otto Rank that they were projected on to the heavens after having arisen elsewhere under purely human conditions. It is in this human condition that our interest lies.

In spite of the slight hint of a mythoclastic rather than a mythologizing attitude in this passage, Freud goes on to evoke marvellously the mythic dimensions of the story, investing it with mystery rather than divesting it of it. Suggesting that the situation in which a woman chooses between three suitors is really an inversion of

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[23] Jung, Collected Works, vol. 5, p. 24; Man and his Symbols, p. 99.

the theme of a man's choice between three women, who are symbolized in the three-caskets story by the caskets, he goes on to draw parallels between this story and the choice of Lear among his three daughters, and between both and a number of myths and fairy tales. He gives the examples of Paris and the three goddesses, of Cinderella and her two sisters, and of Psyche, the youngest again of three sisters in Apuleius's story. His interpretation of this recurrent motif is that the three sisters represent 'the Fates, the Moerae, the Parcae or the Norns, the third of whom is called Atropos, the inexorable'. The story is thus a 'triumph of wish-fulfilment' in which death is transformed into a beautiful woman, and what is inevitable is made a matter of conscious choice.[24]

Whatever one might say of Freud's interpretation of the myth of which he considers the three-caskets story in The Merchant of Venice to be a transformation, it cannot, I think, be denied that once pointed out the analogies between the story and the myth do make the former 'resonate' or 'reverberate' with a sense of deeper significance. One note in this reverberation is, I think, the uncanny feeling of having seen it before. Some works of art, like 'The Ancient Mariner', for example, resonate even without the aid of the myth-critic, though the resonance becomes deeper once the mythic parallels are pointed out (e.g., the myth of the Wandering Jew, the curse of Cain); there are other works which seem to be quite without mystery till the critic indicates these mysterious parallels and thus transfers, as it were, the mana of the myth on to the particular work he is discussing. Freud's comments on the three-caskets theme in The Merchant of Venice achieve this mystifying of the apparently unmysterious very effectively.

Theodore Reik (1952) also comments on the theme of the three caskets in the play, but comes to a very different conclusion. He considers this story as a new version of 'the mythological theme shaped in the legend of the Sphinx and in the Turandot tale'. He argues that Portia is like the

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[24] Freud, pp. 291-3, 296, 299.

Sphinx, even to the point of having a cruel streak in her. In opposition to Freud, who assumes implicitly that collective representations like myths represent the unconscious wishes of the male population, Reik argues that the form of the Sphinx legend is as important as the content, and that if the form is taken into account, the fact that it is a woman posing a riddle assumes great significance. The myth, in fact, expresses the unconscious feelings not of men, but of women, especially the feeling of penis envy and hostility to men generally. Reik concludes: 'The myth, the fairy tale and the play have been discussed because they seem to prove the unconscious meaning of certain feminine behaviour that has not changed much through the ages and appears even in the extraordinary situation of psychoanalysis.'[25] Two almost opposing myths have thus been held to be behind the three-caskets plot in the play -- the myth of the fatal sisters (to put it in its most general form) and the myth of the sphinx. There is the common element in them, however, of a rather sinister woman, however superficially attractive, who poses riddles or pulls down the hero, like lead, to death. 'All that glisters is not gold' seems to be as applicable to Portia as to the golden casket. Norman Holland, on the other hand, interprets Portia as a 'bountiful mother', with Belmont as the primal matrix.[26]

The folk and mythic origins of the other plot in the play, namely, the story of the pound of flesh, have also been pointed out by several writers. Several analogues of the tale in folk tales and mythology have been found.[27] Even more important, perhaps, have been commentaries on Shylock's origin in myth and legend. Among the prototypes of the 'Shylock myth' that have been suggested are Loki, Oedipus, and the Wandering Jew. The origin of the Wandering Jew legend in turn has

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[25] The Secret Self, pp. 88-9, 96.

[26] The Shakespearean Imagination, p. 99.

[27] See note 21 above. See also the New Variorum edition of the play, reprinted (New York, 1964), pp. 309-10, where passages from The Wandering Jew (1881) by M. D. Conway are cited.

been traced down to a very different figure, that of the prophet Elijah.[28] Others have seen behind the figure of Shylock the mythic dimension of the Christian story. Antonio has been compared to Christ,and Shylock, either to the Devil or Jehovah. Theodor Reik, for example, compares Antonio to Christ as well as to non-Christian counterparts of Christ like Attis and Adonis, and Shylock to Jehovah. Even Antonio's nastiness towards Shylock is explained as a parallel to Christ's abusing and whipping of the moneychanger in Jerusalem during Passover. Reik writes: 'Shakespeare wanted to present a Jewish figure as he and his contemporaries saw it, but the character grew beyond human measure into the realm of the mythical, as if the God of the Jews stood behind the stage.' Reik also mentions the feeling, which I have described as resonance, that the awareness of the myth behind the figure of Shylock arouses, but he writes of it as 'a moment of glow' when he discovered for the first time the 'traces of the old myth in the plot'.[29] Barbara Lewalski (1962) also discovers the Christian myth in the play. More than fifty years earlier, in 1908, Julia Ruggles had come to a similar interpretation, but with this difference, that she considered Antonio to represent 'the average moralist' rather than Christ. But she too considered the play as depicting the conflict between two concepts of law and justice, Shylock representing Mosaic law and Portia, the Christian. Belmont is interpreted as the ideal or heavenly city by both these critics.[30]

The play has also been interpreted in terms of esoteric rituals of death and rebirth. Two of such studies make little use of anthropological theories, and even the third, although it does refer to such theories, seems to me to be, in parts, an example of plain allegorization. Paul Arnold (1951) interprets the story of the three caskets as a representation

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[28] Hermann Sinsheimer, pp. 114-17.

[29] The Secret Self, pp. 47-8, 55.

[30] Barbara Lewalski, 'Biblical Allusion and Allegory in The Merchant of Venice', esp. pp. 328-9; Julia Ruggles, The Merchant of Venice : A Metaphysical Interpretation, p. 16.

of the initiation ritual of the Eleusinian mysteries. Antonio's ordeal is also represented by him as initiatory. Following him, Jean Paris relates Antonio's ordeals to the initiatory rites of the masonic brotherhood. He writes:

> As a final proof -- [of the esoteric theme of the play] -- one which, as a matter of fact, occurs in the masonic rites of initiation -- Antonio, like Hamlet, had felt the 'bare bodkin' pressed against his breast. Victorious, he in turn can enter the ideal temple at Belmont and, under the aegis of Portia, found a sort of lodge together with Bassanio, Lorenzo, Gratiano, Jessica, and Nerissa, a superior society governed only by the laws of poetry and music. [31]

A similar pattern of a new life emerging after a period of trials is seen by Paula Brody (1967) as the essence of the plot relating to Antonio. His experience is described by Miss Brody as that of 'tribal initiation, whereby he is reborn as an adult'. (Miss Brody also sees the rituals of the omophagia and of the scapegoat as aspects of Shylock's role in the play, but of that in the next chapter.) She believes that these postulates regarding the roles of Antonio and Shylock are the logical and valid conclusions 'growing out of a myth-and-ritual approach to The Merchant of Venice'. The ritual of initiation is described by Miss Brody as a 'ceremonial death and rebirth' which Antonio (described as 'a youth'!) goes through in order to attain full manhood. After his initiation, according to Miss Brody, Antonio can rejoin the society at Belmont:

> a privilege which has already been enjoyed by everyone else within the group. (This includes even Jessica, who has been made eligible by marriage to one of the Venetian "tribe.") Three times Portia welcomes Antonio (V. lines 139, 239 and 273). Antonio, reborn, says, and rightly, 'Sweet lady, you have given me life and living' (V.i.286). Initiation is complete. [32]

Thus we see that the pattern of death and rebirth which we have been

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[31] Paul Arnold, 'Occultisme Elisabethain', esp. pp. 94 ff.; Paris, Shakespeare, p. 106.

[32] 'Shylock's Omophagia : A Ritual Approach to the Merchant of Venice'.

tracing in the other plays has been discovered in this play as well. The question remains, however, whether Antonio really does undergo any kind of rebirth. Graham Midgley (1960)[33] takes the opposite view of Antonio's role in the play, arguing that he, like Shylock, remains an outcast, a view which, it would seem, receives support from the image of the 'tainted wether of the flock'. But although Miss Brody quotes from Midgley's article, she completely ignores this point of vital difference between their different interpretations. One could argue, however, that this image occurs not at the end, but during the course of Antonio's trial and that at the end of the play Antonio is a different sort of character. But the evidence for such a view seems to be slight. There is no reason why Antonio could not have been married to someone at the end if Shakespeare intended to suggest his integration into the society at Belmont.

In conclusion we can say that both the plots in the play, the three-caskets plot and the pound-of-flesh plot, have been traced by the myth critics to primitive mythic origins, even though one of the plots is developed in a realistic mode, while the other retains the fairy-tale atmosphere of the original. Shylock, indeed, is held to be mythic not merely by virtue of his mythic prototypes but because he seems to have acquired a place in popular imagination quite independent of the play in which he appears. In this respect he is like the other great mythic characters of the European tradition, characters like Faust, Don Juan, Don Quixote, Hamlet, and Falstaff. It is in this sense that critics have written about the 'Shylock myth' or the 'myth of the Jew'. But it is usually maintained that the mythic status of Shylock is due not only to Shakespeare's literary skill, but also to the fact that he was able to reach down to the mythical prototypes behind his sources. Shylock, in other words, is held to have had a past beyond Shakespeare's play.

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[33] Graham Midgley, 'The Merchant of Venice: A Reconsideration', p. 121.

As is evident, I think, from some of the accounts of the play mentioned above, myth criticism is as much concerned with origins as the familiar kind of source studies. It differs from the latter in respect of the region in which this origin is located.

Much Ado about Nothing

I have not come across any discussion of this play specifically in terms of myth and ritual, even though the pattern of death and rebirth is as obviously present in this play as in The Winter's Tale. The story of the heroine calumniated is also very frequently found in folk tales and myths. If Hermione's engineered 'death' and 'rebirth' can be taken to symbolize actual death and rebirth, so also can Hero's. Northrop Frye indeed does make this point. He writes:

> In Much Ado we have the same theme of calumniation, but Shakespeare has put it in something much closer to a primitive context by suggesting so strongly that Hero actually dies and revives during the play: "One Hero died defiled, but I do live," she says.

Frye also compares the story to that of Kalidasa's Sakuntala.[34] There is also a parallel, I suggest, with the heroine in the Ramayana, one of the two great Indian epics. She too is calumniated, has to undergo an ordeal through fire, and finally disappears under the earth, like Persephone. Her twin sons are brought up amidst idyllic surroundings by a holy man, which reminds one of the upbringing of Guiderius and Arviragus in Cymbeline.

As You Like It

Wigston compares Rosalind as an agent of reconciliation with Imogen in Cymbeline and Viola in Twelfth Night. All of them, as well as Perdita in The Winter's Tale, are considered to be representative of Diana-as-Proserpine. As Wigston writes:

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[34] Frye, A Natural Perspective, pp. 53-4.

> If the poet has planned a profound reconciliation through rebirth, of his spiritual unity with its outer symbolic vehicle, then we can imagine no better classical type of this reconciling power than Diana -- particularly in her character of Proserpine. . . . In As You Like It, it is Rosalind who brings about the reconciliation and restitution of the Banished Duke . . . In Pericles Diana is introduced directly as reconciling divinity . . . Diana as Proserpine typified the sleeping power of the earth during winter. She is, therefore, closely connected with death. Her reconciling power is the reconciliation that belongs to the immortality of Nature, that gives back what it takes away, through the grave.[35]

Wigston does not clarify in greater detail how Rosalind can be taken as a Diana figure, though he does elaborate upon the role of Imogen, as we shall see when we come to discuss Cymbeline. But whether one agrees that Rosalind is a Diana figure or not (and I confess I do not always follow the path of Wigston's associations) one thing has, I think, been usefully pointed out, namely, the similarity between the heroines of the several plays with respect to their reconciling function.

H. Coote Lake (1928), who approaches the plays of Shakespeare from the angle of a folklorist, places the plot of this play within the type of folk tale of which he mentions Macbeth and Hamlet as other examples. He refers to this as the Orestes type of plot: of 'rightful heir deprived by relative whom he finally slays and regains throne'.[36]

M. Sennet (1949) interprets the play within a theosophical framework as depicting the myth of paradise lost and regained. Referring to the phrase 'mangled forms' (II. 7. 42) he writes:

> The symbolism of 'mangled forms' may be traced in myth and folk lore and religions. It is an ancient teaching that humanity, coming forth from the Edenic state of wholeness or undifferentiation, becomes split asunder, or loses a sense, or is in some way broken up into diversity and multiplicity as a result of its earthly existence. And it is the function of true Philosophy to teach man how to return again, with all its

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[35] Wigston, pp. 336-7.

[36] 'Some Folklore Incidents in Shakespeare', p. 310.

> garnered harvest of experience, to unity, or at-one-ment, which is a state very different from simplicity.

Sennet brings the play within this broad pattern, which is common to a large variety of esoteric and exoteric cults, through the following equations: the three brothers Oliver, Jaques, and Orlando represent what in the mysteries are referred to as 'Will', 'Wisdom' or 'Intellect' and 'Love' respectively; it is the youngest of these, Orlando, who is successful in the quest for 'Ideal Love', which is represented by Rosalind; Celia is held to represent 'Holiness'; with a little 'hammering it out', Frederick is equated with 'Friedrich' and hence with 'state of Peace'; the Duke Senior is equated with the 'Natural Man' and Frederick-Friedrich, with the 'Spiritual Man' (who finally attains peace); the forest of Arden is related to the 'Dark night of the Soul', and in support of this interpretation, Sennet mentions the examples of Dante, Bunyan, Ibsen's Peer Gynt, the Faerie Queene and Macbeth as well as Babes in the Wood, Red Riding Hood, Sleeping Beauty, and Through the Looking Glass. From the name of Sir Roland de Bois (= Master of the Forest), Sennet infers that he represents 'Man before his Fall'. A parallel is also drawn between the play and the story of Noah, which can be taken to represent the passage from 'tribulation to the regenerate life'. The forest in As You Like It is made to correspond to the flood in the biblical story. While the details of Sennet's interpretation may not be very clear, the broad outline is simple enough and very similar to many of the interpretations of the other plays so far discussed. Remarking that the play, both in its beginning and ending, can be 'matched with the old tales' (this matching being, we might remark, one of the main features of myth criticism), Sennet sums up the theme of these tales and the play as the 'Restoration of fallen man and Paradise Regained'. In conclusion he sets out in tabular form the parallels between the play and the stages of the mystical experience as described by Evelyn Underhill. The five acts of the play are thus seen to correspond to the five stages through which the mystic is led to the culminating experience of 'Union'.[37]

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[37] M. Sennet, His Erring Pilgrimage : A New Interpretation of 'As You Like It', pp. 24, 38-40, 56-62, 92, 95-7.

Richard Knowles (1966) argues that there is a need to combine myth interpretations, which generally neglect specific mythological allusions, with historical studies of mythology (like Douglas Bush's), which generally tend to ignore the broad mythic patterns. He mentions Don Cameron Allen as one of the very few critics who approach 'Shakespeare's mythmaking through his use of an established mythological tradition'. Knowles makes a similar attempt with reference to As You Like It. He argues that Hercules is the dominant mythological figure even though he is mentioned only once in the play. This and other allusions 'consistently make the literal action reverberate beyond itself'. Orlando, according to Knowles, is a Hercules figure, and Hercules in Renaissance mythography is a type of Christ. He also finds other, though less important mythological parallels (e.g. between Duke Senior and Moses in the wilderness; Oliver and Cain; Frederick and the Pharaoh or Herod; Rosalind and Heavenly Rose, etc.). Some of the parallels seem to be rather strained, as when Knowles interprets Rosalind's comments on Oliver and Celia that 'Clubs cannot part them' (V.1.38) as alluding to Hercules's weakness before love. One would have thought that the reference was to pairing dogs. Nevertheless, Knowles's suggestion that the mythical allusions in the play are not merely to the myths, but also to the Renaissance interpretations of them is valuable. He also suggests that there is no necessary contradiction between this historical approach to the mythical allusions and the archetypal approach of the myth critics, since the figures of Christ and Hercules are 'intermediary between Orlando and an archetype of heroic struggle' which may be consistent with 'those outlined by Rank, Raglan, Campbell, and others'.[38]

Twelfth Night

I have already mentioned Wigston's associating of Viola in this play, along with Rosalind, Imogen, and others, with Diana considered

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[38] 'Myth and Type in As You Like It', pp. 2-5, 9-12, 21.

as a deity of reconciliation. The general pattern of discord and harmony which is found as early as in The Comedy of Errors can be easily discerned in this play. Also discernible is the pattern of a period of confusion and loss of identity followed by the regaining of social identity that Northrop Frye traces in the comedies generally, a pattern, one might remark, shared by the initiatory rituals of the mysteries as well as primitive rituals.

Barbara Lewalski (1965) interprets the play in the light of Christian typological exegesis in a manner which suggests, the historical scholarship apart, that the kind of interpretation that we have seen advanced by Wigston and Sennet, although certainly at the periphery of the accepted critical traditions, is nevertheless not as far removed from the 'Christian' interpretation of the plays as one might at first be inclined to think. And the Christian interpretation of the plays, although it has its eccentric and idiosyncratic proponents, is by no means considered to be, as a whole, either esoteric or absurd.

Miss Lewalski's argument is that the themes and motifs of the play 'contain something of religious significance associated with Epiphany and with the Spirit of Christmastide'. Shakespeare's method, according to Miss Lewaksi, is one of 'Christian typology', 'whereby certain real historical events and personages from the Old Testament and (more significantly for the present purposes) from certain classical fictions such as the Metamorphoses or the Aeneid were seen to point to aspects of Christ and of the Gospel story without losing their historical or fictional reality'. This idea is applied to Twelfth Night as follows. Miss Lewalski points out that Illyria is different from what Frye has called the 'green world' and John Vyvyan, 'retreats in the wilderness' because the characters stay on in this world at the end of the play rather than return to the former society. She therefore equates it with 'Elysium'. Illyria, she argues, is a place of 'Good Will' where the 'Bad Will' of Malvolio has no place. But she also suggests, inconsistently, that Illyria, by virtue of its first syllable, may be also associated with Illusion

(witness the self-love and disorder of Malvolio, Olivia, Orsino). The roles of Viola and Sebastian are interpreted as representing the 'dual nature and role of the incarnate Divine Love, Christ', Viola standing for the suffering aspect of Christ, and Sebastian for his Divine exaltation. The final scene is described by Miss Lewalski as containing an 'epiphany' when Sebastian is finally 'manifested'. In brief, Sebastian and Viola, together, 'do indeed bring the "peace" of the season to Illyria through a reordering of its life and its loves'.[39]

The Merry Wives of Windsor

There are a couple of studies dealing with this play in terms of rituals of the scapegoat. These I shall mention in the next chapter. There is another study interpreting the figure of Falstaff in the light of the figure of Actaeon in Renaissance mythography,which we might mention in passing. According to it, Shakespeare's portrayal of Falstaff is 'an obvious burlesque of the Actaeon myth', that myth being interpreted in the Renaissance as an instance of the 'ravages of desire'. Thus, even though Shakespeare's predominant mode in this drama is one of 'bourgeois realism', he adopts the technique of 'mythological symbolism and parody' in its three episodes dealing with the gulling of Falstaff.[40]

All's Well That Ends Well

The similarities between the play and motifs from folk tales and myths have been pointed out by several critics. Karl Simrock (1850) suggested a parallel between the play and the Indian story of 'Sacontala', which is found in the Mahabharata as well as in Kalidasa's play, Sakuntala. In the former, the episode of the ring is missing, but the idea of children reconciling parents is there.[41] In Kalidasa's play,

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[39]'Thematic Patterns in Twelfth Night', esp. pp. 169-70, 176-8.

[40]John M. Steadman, 'Falstaff as Actaeon : A Dramatic Emblem', esp. p. 244.

[41]Simrock, The Remarks of M. Karl Simrock on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays, pp. 96-8.

of course, the motif of the ring is also present. W. W. Lawrence (1931) terms the two folk-motifs in the play 'the Healing of the King' and 'the Fulfilment of the Tasks', and suggests that their origin is to be traced not in the Orient, but rather in 'primitive manners and customs, in the domains of anthropology and folklore'. He does not, however, take upon himself the task of demonstrating this.[42] H. Coote Lake suggests that the whole play is based on folk tale and points out the following folk motifs: the curing of the king, forced marriage, impossible tasks, substitutions, ring or token, and twin sons (these last being prospective only, at best, in the play!). He also mentions the analogous story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. XXXVIII).[43]

James L. Calderwood (1964) relates some of these folk motifs to the theme of micro- and macrocosmic sterility and revitalization that has been popularized through the writings of Frazer and Eliot's The Waste Land, thus bringing the play within the framework of the 'myth and ritual pattern' of death and rebirth that critics have traced in most of the plays discussed so far. Calderwood argues that the king's illness is a kind of sexual impotence corresponding to the sterility in the community at large. The community is ultimately revitalized through Helena's magical powers. While conceding that the play has elements of realism, parody, and satire, Calderwood argues that 'the myth is nevertheless in the play -- though subdued like the dyer's hand to the stuff it works in -- and following its traces can be instructive'. He points to the traditional association of social sterility with sexual impotence and suggests that the healing of the king becomes 'a kind of intellectual-spiritual coitus as a result of which the king is, paradoxically, "rais'd . . . from [his] sickly bed" (II.3.109) and restored to cultural potency'. This sexual symbolizm, he suggests, relates the healing to the bed trick later in the play. Calderwood also draws, briefly, a parallel between this play and Venus and Adonis, Helena corresponding

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[42] Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 33.

[43] H. Coote Lake, pp. 314-18.

to Venus (which helps to bring out the erotic aspect of Helena's cure), Bertram, to Adonis, and Parolles, to the boar (which symbolizes death).[44]

Regeneration or rebirth in a more spiritual aspect has been read into the play by some other critics. G. Wilson Knight (1958) has related Helena's healing powers to the mystic concept of the Third Eye.[45] Beryl Pogson (1963) interprets the play as dramatizing a stage in the initiation of the Hero. She traces a common theme in all the plays of Shakespeare, namely, 'the theme of Man's inner life and his possible redemption and re-birth through the spiritual influence within him which is represented externally in the drama as Woman'. Romeo and Juliet, All's Well, and The Winter's Tale belong, she argues, to three successive periods of Shakespeare's work, in each of which the heroine plays an important role. Juliet, according to her, plays her part in the redemptive process as a sacrifice, Helena, as a healer, and Perdita, as 'the Lost Child of the King whose return signifies his re-birth'. About All's Well specifically Miss Pogson writes that it represents allegorically 'not Man's search for God but God's search for Man and the ultimate triumph of divine love over all human difficulties'. Helena is the Soul, seeking after Bertram the man. The reason for the active role of the former in this process is that 'on some inner planes the feminine principle is said to be more active'. The union of Bertram and Helena, according to Miss Pogson, suggests the planting of 'the Seed of Second Birth'. It is because of this, she suggests, that the twins born from the encounter in the dark in the source are changed by Shakespeare into one child.[46]

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[44] 'Styles of Knowing in All's Well', esp. pp. 275, 279, 287-8.

[45] See the chapter on the play in The Sovereign Flower, esp. pp. 150 ff.

[46] Beryl Pogson, Three Plays by Shakespeare, the Foreword and pp. 21-3, 38.

A similar interpretation of the play, but with greater claims to historical validity, is put forward by Eric La Guardia, who maintains that the major poetic objective of the play is 'to dramatize the regeneration of man and imitate the condition of concordia mundi. The study concentrates on what is described as the 'two regenerative narrative actions in the play', namely, initiation and purification. Apart from the relevance of this to the familiar pattern of rebirth that we have been tracing in the interpretations of the play, La Guardia's analysis suggests that the play is mythic in another sense, in that, belonging to what Frye has called the romantic mode, the play represents an interaction of the divine and the natural through Helena and her chastity.[47] This interaction, we might remark, is generally considered to be a feature of the mythical mode of thinking as we have outlined it in Chapter 3.

Measure for Measure

The play has been interpreted by several critics in the light of Christian ethics, but much of this kind of interpretation falls outside the scope of this study because the concept of 'myth' does not seem to be operative in them in any sense. Such interpretations are allegorical but not of the kind that I have suggested are characteristic of myth criticism because in them there is no attempt to relate the play to any universal pattern of action and events. Some of such allegorical interpretations are, nevertheless, myth criticism in another sense. Implicit in them is the belief that the plays of Shakespeare are like the Scripture or the myths of antiquity in that they contain profound truths hidden from the common eye by the veil of allegory. I shall elaborate upon this point at the end of this chapter.

There are only two studies of the play that I have seen that can, in some ways, be considered as myth criticism. Hanns Sachs (1942)

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[47] La Guardia, 'Chastity, Regeneration, and World Order in All's Well that Ends Well'.

relates the hero of the play, Angelo, to Oedipus, whom he considers to be the prototype of the man who judges himself. The ethical principle, he argues, is especially associated with the 'Oedipus-crime'. Admittedly, there is no hint of this in Measure for Measure, but it is brought out clearly in Hamlet.[48] The parallel between Oedipus and Angelo does, I believe, throw a useful light on the play, whether we choose to emphasize the ethical aspect of their dilemma or the psychological.

A. D. Nuttall (1968) begins his ingenious interpretation by accepting Battenhouse's interpretation of the play as dealing with the concept of Atonement, only to stand this on its head later. The basic idea in the concept of Atonement is the principle of vicarious action, of Christ taking on the sins of humanity and suffering for it. If the Duke represents God (only God the Father, as Nuttall argues), then, he writes: 'Suppose we ask, who, in this play, must obviously correspond to the figure of Christ? It is not surprising that this question has been avoided. The answer is both unthinkable and only too plain.' The answer, of course, is that it is Angelo. The play is thus a critical version of the doctrine of Atonement rather than a straight version of it, with Angelo, as the victim, taking on the necessary sins that human judgment of other human beings involves and thus reconciling the contradiction between the 'ethic of government and the ethic of refraining from judgment'. Not only is the Christian myth, therefore, present in the play, but behind that myth itself, the 'shadowy structure of a disturbingly alien shape'. This structure (later called a 'substructure'), Nuttall suggests, is that of the primitive scapegoat rituals: 'Under the pressure of Shakespeare's genius the figure of the atoning sufferer begins to take on the lineaments of his anthropological ancestor, the scapegoat.' Angelo is thus a 'Christ-figure with a difference', being at the same time also a 'Devil-figure', at once the 'Redeemer and the polluted'. In this way, Nuttall argues, one can account for the mysterious 'resonance of Angelo's character, by showing that the evil he does

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[48] Hanns Sachs, The Creative Unconscious, pp. 85, 91.

has its place in a necessary scheme of redemption'.[49]

The English History Plays

The history plays, with the important exception of the two parts of Henry IV, have, not surprisingly, elicited few commentaries in terms of the myth and ritual pattern. Nevertheless, some critics have discerned the shape of the Christian myth when the plays are taken as a whole, the myth, that is, of fall and redemption. Miss Honor Matthews (1962) describes this as the myth of Lucifer. She writes:

> Shakespeare accepted the myth of Lucifer's rebellion as the archetype of sin and, like his contemporaries, found an acceptable reflection of it in the recent history of his own country . . . Among them [the Elizabethan dramatists] Shakespeare alone traced in English history a picture of sin, justice and redemption such as his fathers had found in the Bible stories, and the Greeks in the legends of Agamemnon and Oedipus.

But Miss Matthews points out that in the Henry VI plays, man's sins are explained not in terms of the archetypal rebellion of Lucifer, but rather in terms 'of its derivative, the more general breach of degree'.[50] Tillyard (1944) sees a basically similar pattern in the whole cycle of Shakespeare's history plays: 'the beginning in prosperity, the distortion of prosperity by a crime, civil war, and ultimate renewal of prosperity'.[51] The shadow of the Christian myth of Edenic innocence, the fall from it, subsequent crime and suffering, and ultimate redemption is easily seen behind this formulation of the theme of the histories.

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[49] 'Measure for Measure : Quid Pro Quo?', esp. pp. 245-6.

[50] Honor Matthews, Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays, pp. 14-15.

[51] E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 267.

I Henry VI

Otto Rank pointed out in The Myth of the Birth of the Hero (1909) that Joan's denial of her parentage followed the well-known mythical pattern of the birth of the hero. 'There seems a certain necessity,' writes Rank, 'for the prophet to deny his parents.'[52] Shakespeare's attitude toward this 'mythical' heroine is, of course, far from uncritical, but in including this episode in the play, he shows, it seems, an awareness of this common feature of mythical heroes.

II Henry VI

Samuel M. Pratt (1965) argues that Humphrey is not merely historical but also 'mythic', his story symbolizing 'the perilous path that the good public servant has to travel in this world'. But even more importantly, in popular thought he became the victim of the Roman Catholic Church, and hence his myth became 'the archetype of what the English Renaissance in its political, religious, and humanistic concerns was all about'.[53] Myth in such usage is associated with social pressures at a particular moment in history rather than with universal, non-historical patterns.

III Henry VI

H. Coote Lake suggests that the episode in II. 5 showing a father who has killed his son and a son who has killed his father should be classed as myth, along with such other myths and legends as that of Sohrab and Rustam, Odysseus and Antigonus, Balam and Balin, and others.[54] I do not, however, think that this is a very important point to make about this episode, since this similarity with the various myths and legends does not seem to lead to any useful perspective on the play as a whole.

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[52] p. 66.

[53] 'Shakespeare and Humphrey Duke of Gloucester: A Study in Myth', pp. 201, 211.

[54] Coote Lake, p. 314.

In the Henry IV plays perhaps such an episode would have had greater mythical reverberation, since the theme of fathers and sons is important there.

Richard III

H. C. Goddard (1951) briefly suggests a Jungian interpretation of the play, referring to the myth of Pegasus in the course of his commentary. Richard III, he writes:

> has failed to come to terms with the nocturnal world -- the other side of life -- the unconscious. Of that unconscious world, from the myth of Pegasus to the White Horses of Rosmersholm, the horse has been the symbol, standing for the living stream of unconscious energy on which unconsciousness rides.

Goddard also suggests that the red and the white rose stand for blood and spirit respectively, the political conflict thus also representing an internal psychic conflict, in keeping with the mythological principle of the continuity between the macrocosm and the microcosm.[55]

J. P. Brockbank (1953) finds in the 'conscience soliloquy' (V.3) a suggestion, though for a moment only, that 'the figure that was born out of an evil society seems capable of carrying out its sins in his consciousness, to a sacrificial death'.[56]

Elements of the hero myth are discerned in the play by Honor Matthews in the figure of Richmond who, like many other mythic heroes, escapes as a child overseas, finally to return to kill the usurper.[57] It is useful to have this pointed out since it helps to link the idea of the 'Tudor myth' with the broad general pattern of myth and ritual, which can be interpreted in so many ways -- as an allegory of the solar cycle, the seasons, death and rebirth, and so on.

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[55]Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare, pp. 39-40.

[56]Brockbank, 'Shakespeare's Historical Myth', p. 298.

[57]Matthews, p. 171.

Clifford Leech (1964) argues that the play presents not only the Tudor myth, but also the 'tragic myth' dealing with rebellion and Nemesis (represented by Richard and Margaret) with the spectator identifying with 'the challenger of order'.[58]

Finally, Norman Holland (1966) has discovered the following simple mythic pattern in the play:

> Good King Henry VI is murdered by a bad king in the image of a boar (as in the myths of Osiris or Adonis) and mourned by three queens. The boar-king, now his successor, lays the land waste, but he is finally killed by good king Henry VII who comes from across the sea to kill the boar-king and set the wasteland free.[59]

The interesting thing to note, however, is that even if the Adonis and other hero myths are behind the play, the interest is focused, not on the hero but on the giant or the boar. In Macbeth, similarly, Macduff has all the attributes of the mythical hero, but the centre of interest is the evil Macbeth.

King John

I have not come across any discussion of this play in terms of myth or ritual.

Richard II

There is no interpretation of this play in terms of 'solar myth', as far as I know, but a study of the sun-king imagery in the play could easily be associated with such a myth.[60] The play has, however, attracted Christian mythologizing in the tradition of typological-allegorical hermeneutics. As Glynne Wickham (1969) puts it, the relationship of

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[58]Leech, 'Shakespeare, Cibber, and the Tudor Myth', pp. 90-4.

[59]Holland, Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare, p. 336.

[60]See, e.g., S. K. Heninger, 'The Sun-King Analogy in Richard II', Shakespeare Quarterly, 11 (1960), 319-27.

the content of this play to the form springs 'naturally from the native English dramatic tradition, grounded on biblical narrative treated typologically'.[61] J. A. Bryant (1961) also maintains that one of the characteristics of Shakespeare's dramaturgy from this play onwards is 'his persistent use of the Biblical story as analog for his secular fable'. Bryant gives as an example the identification of Richard with Christ and Everyman, being thus presented as microchristus as well as microcosmos. Bryant also admits the possibility of analogies with primitive or non-christian rituals, himself suggesting that three of the four rituals of fertility that Cornford found significant for the development of drama show similarities with the action of Richard II. These are, in Cornford's terms, 'The Carrying out of Death', in which the sin of the whole kingdom is sought to be purged with the death of a single sacrificial victim; 'The Fight of Summer and Winter'; and finally, the deposing the old king, or old year, by the new. Bryant's conclusion is that Shakespeare, by frequently alluding to 'the symbolic substance of analogous pagan ritual (sun and ice, summer and winter, etc.) presents a work which has 'ritual analogy with the sacrifice on the cross'. In thus 'laying the outlines of such a complex and richly suggestive symbol against the surface of his chronicle material', Shakespeare, 'whether he realized it or not at the time', 'had given to secular fable a significance that it had achieved only rarely in drama since the days of Aeschylus and Sophocles'.[62]

The 'significance' that Bryant has in mind is viewed in a specifically Christian sense, but we can see how this is associated with 'significance' in a wider sense, and with the feeling that we have referred to as 'resonance' if we recall, as I pointed out in Chapter 3, that many writers associate myth with the transcendental as opposed to the ordinary secular reality. The awareness of this transcendental perspective behind a work, whether it be specifically Christian or more generally religio-

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[61] Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage, p. 179.

[62] Bryant, Hippolyta's View, pp. 21-5.

mythic (and, as we saw in that chapter, for writers like Wheelwright the two latter terms are inseparable), gives to it a 'resonance' which it would not otherwise have, a significance that raises it out of the ordinary level of art and invests it with a mythic status. I would also like to recall, in this connexion, the passage from Edwin Honig cited earlier where he compares the mana in an object with the allegory (or, we might add, the archetype) in a text.[63] Shakespeare, we might say, paraphrasing Bryant in our terminology, from Richard II onwards, habitually endows his secular texts with the mana of the Christian Scripture. In the more far-fetched Christian mythologizing, however, we could argue, it is not Shakespeare but the critic-as-priest who, in Honig's words, 'endows the object [the text] with mana'. Thus, if it is granted, as I have been arguing, that one of the objects of myth criticism is to evoke the 'resonance' in a work, its mana-possessing quality, its mystery, its transcendental reverberations, then some Christian interpretations too can qualify as such criticism. Stanley Edgar Hyman (1970) does, in fact, equate the two when he describes 'theological criticism' or 'words about God'--as 'Christian myth criticism'.[64]

I and II Henry IV and Henry V

These plays have elicited a larger number of commentaries in terms of myth and ritual, the mythic or ritual origins or parallels of Falstaff being the chief preoccupation of such studies. Falstaff's connexion with the magico-mythical realm is hinted at by Frazer himself in the only allusion to Shakespeare in The Golden Bough when he cites the description of Falstaff's death, 'even just between twelve and one, e'en at the turning o'th'tide' (Henry V, II.3.13), as an example of belief in homœopathic magic of the tides.[65]

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[63] See pp. 30-1 above.

[64] Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of his Motivation, p. 29.

[65] The Golden Bough, 3rd edition (London, 1963), The Magic Arts, I, 168.

Lord Raglan (1936) maintains that Falstaff belongs to the world of mythology, that he is as mythical as Hecate or Ariel, though much more solid. He relates the figures of Hal and Falstaff to similar figures in myths and legends where the hero is accompanied by a buffoon, for example: Dionysus and Silenus, Akbar and Birbal, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The origin of Falstaff, he suggests, lies in the primitive belief in the fool as holy (cf. Falstaff's resting in Arthur's bosom), and his drunkenness is related to the frequent association of prophecy with the use of intoxicants and drugs.[66]

John Dover Wilson (1944) describes Falstaff as a 'composite myth' incorporating the figures of the Devil, the Vice, and Riot, as well as the miles gloriosus of Latin comedy. The myth behind the plot of the play, he suggests, is that of the prodigal son, secularized and modernized by Shakespeare. But Dover Wilson argues that Falstaff has become 'a kind of god in the mythology of modern man' in another way. Although he has descended from the medieval devil, he 'does for our imaginations very much what Bacchus and Silenus did for those of the ancients; and this because we find it extraordinarily exhilarating to contemplate a being free of all the conventions, codes and moral ties that control us'.[67]

John Heath-Stubbs (1949) relates the figure of Falstaff to 'a recurring type in mythology, folk-lore and heroic saga', namely, the figure of the 'fabulous glutton' who was originally a god. He compares Falstaff in this respect with Gargantua, Heracles, the Norse Thor, the Irish Dagda, and the Celtic deity Beli or Belinus. Heath-Stubbs also draws a parallel between Falstaff in his relation with Hal and Dido in hers with Aeneas. Both Dido and Falstaff are held to symbolize 'passion' or 'corporeal humanity'. W. H. Auden (1959) makes a similar comparison between Falstaff in love with the prince and stories in which

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[66] The Hero, pp. 215, 222.

[67] The Fortunes of Falstaff, pp. 20-2, 128.

an immortal mermaid falls in love with a mortal, only to lose both her immortality and her mortal.[68]

Martin Lings (1966) interprets the play (Henry IV) in terms of esoteric lore. He distinguishes between esoteric and exoteric art in the following way: exoteric art is concerned only with salvation; esoteric art, on the other hand, 'looks beyond salvation to sanctification'. Sanctification is the regaining of man's lost paradise, and Lings argues that it has been the object of all esoteric cults, including the Freemasons and the Rosicrucians. Henry IV is a dramatization, according to Lings, of the Prodigal Son story, which he interprets esoterically and 'anagogically' as depicting 'the exodus of the soul from the state of original sin to the state of sanctification'. This could be the meaning of the play, Lings argues, even without Shakespeare's intending it, though it does seem to be intentional. The rejection of Falstaff, in his view, represents the soul's final purification, the victory of the Red Cross Knight over the Dragon.[69]

Sitansu Maitra (1967) attempts to explain the figure of Falstaff and the effect of his rejection in the light of Jungian psychology. He argues that Falstaff is the Renaissance variant of the trickster symbol. This figure is seen as a manifestation of the shadow side of the personality; he has the 'syncretic nature of assimilating to himself his older archetypes'; and he rises from the unconscious when conscious life becomes too one-sided. The rejection of Falstaff is right because 'Prince Hal could integrate the trickster (Falstaff) in himself and as he attained a higher degree of psychic stability the trickster lost his hold over the Prince which is what is meant by the rejection of Falstaff'.[70]

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[68] Heath-Stubbs, 'The Mythology of Falstaff', pp. 22-3, 30; Auden, 'The Fallen City: Some Reflections on Shakespeare's Henry IV', p. 25.

[69] Shakespeare in the Light of Sacred Art, pp. 18, 22.

[70] Psychological Realism and Archetypes, pp. 93, 97, 103, 127.

Finally, I myself would like to draw attention to a minor mythic motif in the play. The presence of an adversary to the hero-prince in the figure of Hotspur, whom Shakespeare deliberately and unhistorically makes of the same age as Hal, has parallels in myths and legends. In the Indian epic Mahabharata there is such a pair in Arjuna and Karna, who are actual brothers without being aware of it and are closest to each other in terms of age and talents, though belonging to rival camps. Hector and Achilles are perhaps a similar pair, and in Shakespeare's drama we have other examples of such pairs in Hamlet and Fortinbras, Hamlet and Laertes, and Macbeth and Banquo. Psychologically,this motif seems to express sibling rivalry.

Henry VIII

G. Wilson Knight (1947) considers this play to be a culmination of the entire work of Shakespeare. From our point of view the interesting aspect of Knight's criticism of the play is the emphasis on the play's 'national statement'. This seems to suggest that for Knight the play is a synthesis of myth and history. This would be especially the case with the prophetic vision centred in the infant Elizabeth. Knight relates this 'prophetic emphasis on a child' to the Virgilian and Christian tradition, and also remarks that the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles 'show similar completions in national statement'. R. A. Foakes and Howard Felperin, however, split up between them Knight's synthesis of the antithesis of myth and history. Foakes (1957) argues that the play marks Shakespeare's return from the magic of the romances to the world of historical fact. On the other hand, Howard Felperin (1966) argues that the play merely represents 'an orthodox translation of the heterodox myths of process rendered in the romances', the symbolic pagan deities of the earlier plays being superseded by the familiar God of Christianity. The play shows, according to Felperin, that like other ageing English poets, Shakespeare finally 'embraces traditional answers to questions which he had spent his career formulating on both sides'. Shakespeare, in other words, goes from one set of myths (in the romances) to another

myth, but with great loss of intensity.[71]

The Tragedies

The genre of tragedy has attracted more studies in terms of anthropological theories about primitive rituals of the scapegoat than the other genres. The 'Cambridge Anthropologists' were primarily concerned with tragedy, although Cornford extended their theories to comedy as well. Frazer himself saw the lineaments of tragedy in the primitive sacrificial rituals of king-killing that he documented at such length. In specifically mythic (rather than ritual) terms also critics have seen individual tragedies as variations on what has been called by Philip Wheelwright 'the myth of tragedy'. Clifford Leech also, as we saw in the discussion of Richard III, uses the term the 'tragic myth', implying by it not merely that the myth of rebellion and Nemesis is tragic, but also that it is the myth of tragedy as a whole. As already pointed out, Herbert Weisinger sees tragedy in terms of the myth and ritual pattern of death and rebirth, the 'monomyth', we might call it, of which the individual tragedies are variations. The genre has also been related to the Christian myth, especially by G. Wilson Knight (1936), who argues that 'each of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is a miniature Christ', and that the Christian Mass can be seen as central to Shakespearean tragedy. Northrop Frye (1957) includes Christ among tragic heroes. Roy Battenhouse (1969) also sees, at least in Shakespearean tragedy, the presence of the Christian myth, although, in opposition to Frye and Knight, he suggests that it is not Christ but rather Adam who is the 'ultimate archetype for the tragic hero'.[72] This view links up with Clifford Leech's description

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[71] Wilson Knight, The Crown of Life, Ch. VI, esp. p. 331; Foakes, The Arden edition of Henry VIII, p. lxiv; Felperin, 'Shakespeare's Henry VIII : History as Myth', pp. 43-6.

[72] Wheelwright, 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', pp. 30-1; Knight, Shakespearian Production, p. 157; Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 213-16; Battenhouse, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 91.

of the tragic myth as one of rebellion and Nemesis, and with the Aristotelian concept of the tragic flaw in the hero as the factor which leads to catastrophe.

Titus Andronicus

There is one study of the play which discusses it in terms of ritual origins (Desmonde, 1955). The author's thesis is that 'the plot of the tragedy Titus Andronicus was derived by Shakespeare or one of his contemporaries from a Roman play or myth stemming from Greek ritual origins, and ultimately from tribal puberty rites'. Desmonde describes the major episodes of the play as follows: 'the struggle between two princes for the kingship, following the death of the old king; a human sacrifice to propitiate the dead soul; a marriage by capture in which a son is killed; a rape near a pit in the ground; and a cannibalistic meal. Furthermore, all of Titus's sons are gradually killed, with the exception of the last, who succeeds to the kingship'. These episodes, according to Desmonde, derive from the myths of Pelops and the Rape of Persephone, 'both of which were enacted frequently in antiquity as ritual dramas'. The former myth is related, according to Desmonde, to oedipal conflicts in the 'primal horde' and to the rituals seeking to assuage the guilt of the primal crime. This is also related to tribal puberty rites, following Theodor Reik, by arguing that these rites are merely reenactments of the primal crime, but with the son taking the place of the father and atoning for the guilt of the brother-horde. The puberty initiation rites were also, suggests Desmonde, ceremonies portraying the death and rebirth of the neophyte. The Persephone myth, according to Desmonde's hypothesis, represents 'female puberty rites' as opposed to the male initiation rites whose traces can be found in the Pelops and Dionysus myths. The episode in the play which corresponds to the myth and ritual of Persephone is, of course, the rape of Lavinia near a pit, the pit being an important detail since it suggests the disappearance of Persephone under the earth. Thus, Desmonde concludes, 'Titus Andronicus is the survival of a male and a

female puberty rite of primitive origins, which survived in classical Greece in the Eleusinian mysteries'. He admits that the source of Shakespeare's play may be the story of Procne and Philomela in Ovid, but suggests that this in no way invalidates his theory since Ovid himself seems to be aware of the ritual associations of the myth and places the scene of Tereus and Philomela at the time of the Bacchic rites. And when, as Desmonde points out, Procne, like Demeter, went in search of the ravished and hidden virgin, 'she was clad in the ritual attire of the Dionysian revels'.[73]

The play, then, is to be seen as representing the pattern of death and rebirth associated with initiation rituals. Strictly according to the plan of this study this article should have been discussed in the next chapter, but it seems to me that in spite of the copious references to anthropologists, Desmonde's interpretation of the play really belongs to the tradition of allegorical mythography, with a psychological theory replacing the former theological syncretism. At any rate, there seems to be little difference between comparing the play to the myth of Persephone and comparing it to the ritual of tribal initiation, since both are interpreted as pointing to the same psychological theme. The point that the myth mediates, as it were, between the ritual and the work of art does not seem to matter very much here, meaning little more than that it occupies a middle position in a purely temporal sense.

Honor Matthews (1962) points out that Lucius, who comes back from over the mountains to establish order in Rome, is like the hero figures or saviours that we come across in myths. Miss Matthews also makes the interesting observation that in this play as well as others Shakespeare splits the mythic figure (of the Saviour-hero) into two, so that while one figure wins the victory and establishes order, the actual slaying of the tyrant is done by the other (e.g., Macduff does the slaying,

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[73] William H. Desmonde, 'The Ritual Origin of Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus'.

but Malcolm takes over the reign of Scotland; Edmund does the slaying of the old year, but Edgar becomes king). In this way Shakespeare is able to resolve the problem that the action of revenge creates, namely setting the law of talion in motion.[74] Robert Hapgood (1965),who is concerned with the differences as well as similarities between sacrificial rituals and tragedy, argues that in his mature tragedies Shakespeare presents rites 'maimed by reality', that is, that he strikes a balance between fulfilling our hopes that the sacrifice of the hero would bring about regeneration of the community and disappointing them. In the early tragedies, however, Shakespeare shows either complete success for his rituals of sacrifice, as in Titus, Romeo and Juliet, and Richard III, or complete failure, as in Richard II and Julius Caesar.

The characters in Titus Andronicus, Hapgood suggests, are like a great body mutilated and dismembered and waiting to be reborn. Titus purges five enemies, sacrifices the innocent Lavinia, and finally himself, the 'hero-scapegoat', for the sake of metamorphosis in the whole community. The saviour of this community is Lucius. Hapgood discerns in this play, as in the other early tragedies, a mythic dimension, in that Aaron, the evil figure is linked to the devil, and Lucius's departure and return parallel that of Astraea, Goddess of Justice, who, in Ovid, is the last to leave the iron age before the deluge, and in Virgil, the first to return with the second golden age. Hapgood also points out that Titus is the first of the tragic heroes to undergo the twin change from cynosure to outcast and from admirable nobleman to hunted monster. The hero as scapegoat 'becomes the worst case of the very ills he would purge'.[75]

Thus we can see that all the three critics mentioned in connexion with this play discern the myth and ritual pattern of death and rebirth (Miss Matthews only incidentally). But the pattern is here associated with the whole community rather than with individuals.

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[74]Matthews, p. 171.

[75]Hapgood, 'Shakespeare's Maimed Rites: The Early Tragedies', pp. 494-6.

Romeo and Juliet

As early as 1850 Karl Simrock related the play to the stories of Hero and Leander, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Tristan and Isolde. 'The last mentioned,' writes Simrock, 'is only the most modern form, the last renascence of the ancient myth, which represents the idea of love, and of its tragic fate, in the simplest and most consistent manner.'[76] Simrock also mentions parallels to the story in oriental myths, though he does not name any.

William Archer (1884) mentions Simrock's derivation of the plot of the play from the myths of Pyramus and Thisbe and Hero and Leander and says that 'no one who realizes the true nature of the mythopoeic tendency will find this theory either far-fetched or startling'. All these stories, he suggests, 'are collateral outgrowths of some primitive legendary embodiment of the sweet vehemence of young desire'. Shakespeare, according to Archer, 'instinctively recognized' the 'primitiveness and well-nigh symbolic universality of the subject he had chosen'. This idea that Shakespeare manages to penetrate to the essential myth behind all its sophisticated versions is fairly common. It occurs in Freud's essay on the theme of the three caskets, for example, and we shall come across more references to it. We see in Archer's essay the close relation that 'myth criticism' has with origin studies, especially in the nineteenth century, which is hardly surprising if we consider that myths are the earliest of possible sources for the plays. Archer also suggests that a fairy-tale is 'myth adapted to the nursery-fireside view of life', and that myth itself is 'unconditioned by time or place'. Myth, in other words, is at once the most universal and the most primitive, timeless as well as the first in time. Finally, it might be mentioned that Archer considers the story of the play to be one of the 'age-old myths of the Aryan race' to which Shakespeare was attracted by choice rather than chance.[77]

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[76]Simrock, Remarks, pp. 8-9.

[77]William Archer, 'The Myth of Romeo and Juliet', pp. 441-4, 448.

Wigston argues that the play celebrates Love's martyrs, 'but in some profounder sense than metaphor'. Romeo, according to him, is none other than Eros or Phanes, because he carries a torch in I.4. Phanes, the God of Love in Orphic mythology, is also associated with a torch, that being the meaning of his name. Wigston writes that 'Dadouchos or Torchbearer at Eleusis was this mystic Love, Phanes himself'. Romeo-Eros-Phanes is also equated with Bacchus-Priapus, the thumb-biting in the first scene being taken as a Priapic gesture, which no doubt it is. Juliet, in Wigston's equations, represents Night, the Moon, and Diana; Mercutio=Mercury=Hermes, the sacred herald. Wigston also compares Juliet to some other heroines in Shakespeare. He writes that like Juliet, Hero, Imogen, Hermione, and Thaisa also fall 'into a death sleep or simulated death, that has no reality except in appearance . . . They return to life with restoration to their husbands'. As for Romeo, he seems:

> the very incarnation of Love, as the creative energy of life itself personified and deified, suffering as the Logos, as Adonis, Bacchus descending into the tomb, the Divine Word crucified in the sepulchre of this transcendent art, yet immortal as the divine principle he represents -- Love deified, to be reborn.[78]

This is mythological syncretism run riot. But it is curious how many of the ideas that have become common currency in later myth criticism are anticipated here -- the idea of death and rebirth, the equation of Christ with other dying gods, the emphasis on the figures of Persephone and Dionysus, and, though not here, the myth of the seasons.

Theodore Heline (1936) also interprets the play in terms of occult thought. It is best described in the author's own words in the following passage which, incidentally, plays many variations on the One Timeless Theme, the one Monomyth:

> As stated at the outset, Romeo and Juliet is deeply occult. It depicts the tragedy of separateness; it is a poetic version of

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[78] Wigston, pp. 201, 206-8, 215, 221-2, 238.

the biblical episode of Cain and Abel. It is an esoteric treatment of the one becoming two. It is a story of the children of the 'sorrowful star', the earth, with emphasis placed on humanity's passage through the place of duality.

The characters, Romeo and Juliet, voice the longing of the human soul for completeness; they portray humanity's struggle to surmount separateness and to regain unity; they represent all mankind in its effort to regain the spiritual vision which it possessed before taking on the veils of dividing forms.[79]

The idea of an initial unity from which we fell into separateness is very similar to the familiar myths of paradise, and the presence of the myth behind the idea cannot be ruled out. It often becomes difficult to distinguish 'myth criticism' from 'mythical' criticism. Another feature of this kind of criticism, especially evident in Wigston's syncretic identifications and equations, is also characteristic of the mythical mode of thought as Cassirer and others have described it, namely, the identification of different deities, myths and themes. I would like to end this section by quoting again the passage by Hermann Oldenberg about the Vedic deities:

> They fear one another, penetrate one another, interweave and pair with one another. . . . One passes into the other, becomes the other, is a form of the other, is the other. . . . It would seem that once two representations find themselves in certain proximity, it is impossible to keep them apart.[80]

This, as I suggested there, could apply as much to this kind of myth criticism as to the kind of thought that went into the creation of myths.

Finally, very briefly, three other discussions of the play. Beryl Pogson (1953-6) also considers the play as dealing with the theme of dualism, pointing out that Verona was the centre of Dualism, 'the secret faith of the Cathari'. Dualism in another form is also emphasized by Harry Levin (1960), (and by Caroline Spurgeon and others who have

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[79]Theodore Heline, The Occult in Shakespeare : Romeo and Juliet, pp. 35-6.

[80]See p. 75 above.

commented on the contrast between light and darkness in the play). Levin subsumes various imagistic oppositions in the play under the 'all-embracing one of Eros and Thanatos, the leitmotif of the Liebestod, the myth of the tryst in the womb'. Sitansu Maitra (1967) considers Mercutio as a trickster figure representing the shadow side of the personality, who is no longer needed once Romeo matures. 'Mercutio,' he writes, 'is the simple Hans in Grimm's Tales who becomes King Romeo after the sea-journey, i.e., death.'[81]

Julius Caesar

Edward T. Herbert (1970) undertakes a 'mythic interpretation' of the play in the light of Freud's theory of the primal horde. In its bare outline, he suggests, 'the plot is a dramatization of an archetypal situation such as that discussed by Freud in Totem and Taboo'. Julius Caesar, according to this interpretation, corresponds to the ruler of the primal horde and his murder, to the primal crime. The conspirators, like the patricidal brothers, enter into a blood-bond, signifying that the entire clan assumes responsibility for the crime. Caesar is thus the totem figure, a father to the conspirators, who are all young men. Caesar's continuing power even after death results from the remorse that follows the primal crime. Herbert concludes:

> Actions, therefore, which seem at first to be contradictory or inconsistent, are seen to be natural and deeply rooted in the human psyche when viewed in light of Freudian insights. A mythic approach in interpreting the play, consequently, shows the aptness of naming the tragedy after one who was sacrificed on the Ides of March.[82]

There is another and earlier article on the play entitled 'Deification and Myth-making in Julius Caesar' by R. E. Spakowski in University Review (1969) which should, judging from its title, be of interest from this point of view, but unfortunately I have not been able to read it.

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[81] Beryl Pogson, Three Plays, p. 1; Harry Levin, 'Form and Formality in Romeo and Juliet, p. 8; Maitra, p. 46.

[82] 'Myth and Archetype in Julius Caesar'.

Hamlet

The close connexion between source studies and myth criticism is brought out very clearly from the history of Hamlet criticism. As early as 1870, Karl Simrock, in the course of discussing the sources of this play, relates it to the Norse myth of Odin and Vali. Simrock relates this myth to the solar theme, suggesting that Odin is a sun-god who descends to lower regions and stays there for seven years (=seven months) so that Rinda, the frozen Earth, might, after the death of Baldur, the God of Light, give birth to another son, Vali, who should avenge the death of Baldur and bring back the light of returning spring. Reviewing Simrock's book Die Quellen des Shakespeare, Felix Liebrecht (1871) points out that Simrock had already, in an earlier book, traced the shadow of old popular legends behind the episode of the journey to Britain. Liebrecht continues:

> In the present work he carries this idea still further, and inclines to believe that this legend, like most others, was originally mythological, and referred to the life of the world in the annual revolution of the seasons, and from its greatest antiquity might have been known to the Romans.[83]

Although the important idea of the sacrificial death of the year god or the vegetation deity is missing here, yet it cannot be denied that this anticipates not only Frazer but one of the central themes of myth criticism. We might point out, in parenthesis, that Frazer himself wrote a brief note on Shakespeare to point out a Slavonic parallel to The Merchant of Venice.[84] From pointing out parallels to hypothesizing a common origin and theme is a short step, though not one that Frazer takes in this note. In connexion with Simrock's seasonal myth I would also like to recall Wigston's relating of the theme of the seasons with that of death and rebirth.

Simrock's theory about the mythological origin of the Hamlet

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[83] Felix Liebrecht, The Academy, 1 June 1871, pp. 277-9.

[84] G. S. Frazer, 'A Slavonic Parallel to The Merchant of Venice', The Academy, 9 May 1885, pp. 330-1.

saga has been adopted and elaborated upon by several writers. John Fiske (1873), a 'solar' mythologist, takes up Simrock's point that the story of Hamlet 'when traced back to its Norse original, is unmistakably the story of the quarrel between summer and winter, and the moody prince is as much a solar hero as Odin himself', but suggests that, of course, Shakespeare was not conscious of this solar myth. It was, nevertheless, present in the play as a 'faded nature myth', just as there are faded metaphors behind many words. Fiske's theory is thus a mixture of animism and Indo-European philology.[85]

Yet another writer (1889) has this to say in the course of a review of a book on Hamlet which advanced the theory that the play depicts not an individual but a type illustrating the conflict between will and passion:

> Mr. Cooke [the writer whose book is being discussed] supports his theory with much earnestness, and whether it be true or no, it is interesting as illustrating the inevitable tendency of criticism in all ages, thus: Hamlet, or Amleth, first emerges from the night of the past as a mythical Norse hero who typified the quarrel between Summer and Winter; next he appears in the guise of an historical prince upon whom the poet seizes to make of him "what we see . . ." Finally the critic, sooner or later, unconscious of the original mythical character of the hero, yet utterly unable to resist the relentless wheels of fate, reduces him again to a myth, though of another sort. Having started a type of the warfare of nature, he ends up a type of the warfare of mind.[86]

Almost as if in illustration of what this reviewer has said, thirty years later, John T. MacCurdy (1918) relates the seasonal myth with the Oedipus complex in the course of a comparative study of Hamlet and

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[85] John Fiske, Myths and Myth-Makers, pp. 195-6. For Fiske's animistic theory, cf., e.g., the following : 'The sun and the clouds, the light and the darkness, were once supposed to be actuated by wills analogous to the human will', ibid., p. 134.

[86] See Poet-Lore, 1 (1889), 100-1. See also Sinclair Korner, 'Hamlet as Solar Myth'; Sir Israel Gollancz, The Sources of Hamlet, pp. 35-6; and Otto Rank, Psychology and the Soul, pp. 67-9.

Orestes. Norman Holland puts the point thus, that according to MacCurdy, the 'Winter-Summer conflict simply works out in seasonal images the Oedipus Complex'.[87]

Sinclair Korner, whose interpretation of A Midsummer-Night's Dream I have already mentioned, interprets Hamlet too as a solar myth. Hamlet -- both father and son -- represent summer and sunshine; Claudius, winter and darkness; and Gertrude, the earth-goddess Flora, equally at home in the arms of either brother. Korner's essay brings out, I think, one aspect of myth criticism very clearly, namely, its similarity to the imagery approach. For the solar myth in the play is discovered largely through a study of the imagery of the play. Korner refers to the prevalence of 'solar similes' in the speeches of Hamlet, although his concept of 'solar' includes not only Jove, but also Mars, Mercury, and the sea and the wind.[88] Both the myth and the imagery approaches to a work attempt to grasp the pattern which is below the level of plot and character and which is revealed through the indirections of similes and metaphors. The chief difference between the two approaches lies, I think, in the formulation of this subliminal pattern, the myth critic trying to go beyond the mere imagery approach in relating the pattern to archetypal or universal themes, especially as found in the myths of antiquity. The myth critic therefore concentrates generally on those images which can most fruitfully be related to these universal patterns. Such images tend to be associated with natural phenomena, the changes of the seasons, the annual and diurnal progress of the sun, agricultural processes, and so on. It is such images, it will be remembered, that Colin Still included in his list of universal symbols, although he simplified the list even further by reducing these natural phenomena also to their elemental level.[89]

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[87] John T. MacCurdy, 'Concerning Hamlet and Orestes'. For Holland's comments see Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare, p. 187.

[88] Korner, 'Hamlet as Solar Myth'.

[89] See p. 27 above.

Gilbert Murray's famous essay on 'Hamlet and Orestes' (1914) is important because it relates the seasonal or solar myth (from Korner's essay it is clear that the two amount to the same thing) to Frazer's anthropological studies in rituals of king-killing. But it is interesting to note that although he also interprets Hamlet in terms of its origin in 'that prehistoric and world-wide ritual battle of Summer and Winter, of Life and Death', he complicates (or confuses) the pattern by equating the hero not with Summer, but with Winter.[90] In thus presenting a view the very opposite of Simrock's and others' Murray, I think, puts a very big question mark at the very idea of there ever being such a pattern as that of the battle of summer and winter. Murray's description of Hamlet, it seems to me, is closer to our experience of the play, but it does not make much sense to associate Hamlet (as Murray does) both with the right cause and with winter (and death). The moral and the seasonal themes seem to coexist rather uneasily, but where they are harmonized, as in Simrock, Korner, and others, it is done with considerable violence to our experience of Hamlet as a predominantly melancholy figure and hence as associated with winter rather than summer. One could, of course, argue that Hamlet is the sun during the winter of Claudius's reign, but the association of Claudius with winter is not at all evident.

I would now like to mention some studies of the play in terms other than those of seasonal myths. Hamlet has been compared with both Orestes and Oedipus, the comparison with Orestes going back to at least 1709.[91] The comparisons are made, of course, within varying theoretical frameworks, ranging from the purely literary to the psychological and anthropological. William Ward Crane (1891) compares the three figures of Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras to similar triads in Greek and other mythologies, referring to Prometheus (interpreted to mean 'fore-thinker', i.e. Hamlet), Epimetheus ('after-thinker', i.e. Laertes), and Atlas (the 'strong in arms' -- Fortinbras) and to the Indian

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[90] Gilbert Murray, 'Hamlet and Orestes', p. 41.

[91] See Richmond Y. Hathorn, Tragedy, Myth, and Mystery, p. 262.

triad of Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. Crane suggests that this recurrence of triads might have something to do with the superstitious regard for the number three which, in turn, might have grown out of 'the same ancient idea of two opposing forces in nature, with a third principle beneficiently supplying what they lacked or left wanting'.[92] There is something to be said for this explanation of the recurrence of the number three, but I think that as far as Hamlet is concerned it leaves out of consideration the important figure of Horatio, who certainly belongs to the same group of young men. But it could be argued that Horatio is not as important a character, and certainly not important in the same way, as the other three. Horatio is presented as entirely passive in thought and deed.

Joseph Campbell briefly refers to the play in his Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) in the course of discussion of that stage in his 'monomyth' in which the hero encounters Woman-as-temptress.[93]

D. S. Savage (1952) examines the alchemical images in the play and suggests that what the images refer to is 'transmutation in reverse'. In other words, 'they are used to point a tendency, not towards regeneration, but degeneration'. Nevertheless, Savage suggests, 'the process of degeneration shows the unity which underlies the triple theme of generation, regeneration and degeneration which the play explores'.[94]

Jean Paris (1959) relates the play to the primal theme of Creation, Fall and Redemption. Like Crane (although he does not mention him) he interprets the three sons in the play as representing three attitudes to revenge and to thought and action generally, and like Crane, again, he interprets Fortinbras as the synthesis of the attitudes represented by Hamlet and Laertes. Both Hamlet and Laertes are in a way men divided within themselves, just as the society to which they belong is torn with strife and division. Paris writes:

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[92] Crane, 'The Allegory in Hamlet'.

[93] pp. 7 (footnote), 122-3, 328.

[94] 'Alchemy in Shakespeare's Hamlet'.

> Beginning with a profound corruption in the existing nature of men and things -- 'there is something rotten in the state of Denmark' -- Shakespeare leads us through spiritual strife, division, and war toward an ultimate purification and recapture of the pristine state of innocence. Hamlet's world is the rotten world destined to return to dust, while Fortinbras' is the 'shape of things to come', perfect once more in its order, unity, and purity.

Paris also refers to D. S. Savage's article on the alchemical imagery in the play and suggests that alchemy gives us an archetype of tragic catharsis, in that according to it 'all must rot and rust in order to be changed into gold'. Finally, Paris argues that this dialectic of fall and redemption can also be found in all of Shakespeare's historical dramas.[95]

Alexander A. Vannovsky (1962) also discusses the play in terms of the myth of paradise, but in a rather obscure manner, as the title of his book itself might lead one to expect: The Path of Jesus from Judaism to Christianity, as Conceived by Shakespeare (Disclosure of a Hidden Jewish Plot in Shakespeare's Tragedy "Hamlet"). At any rate the broad outline of the relevant part of Vannovsky's interpretation is clear: Claudius is the Serpent, Gertrude's seduction resembles that of Eve, and the play of Gonzago also represents the same biblical myth of the fall. In Vannovsky's own words:

> Gonzago represents a screen behind which is hidden the staging of the eternal myth about the fall of a heavenly entity into the midst of the sensuous world, and how this fall is being utilized for its own aims by the evil power. Therefore, Gonzago serves as a screen to the staging of the eternal myth, just as the Danish plot of Hamlet serves as a screen for the Jewish plot of the tragedy.[96]

Richmond Y. Hathorn (1962), using the speech about the rugged Pyrrhus (II. 2. 444) as a starting point, compares the story of Hamlet to that story. It seems that Hathorn's conclusion that Hamlet represents an individual in the state of Acedia precedes rather than follows from

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[95] Jean Paris, 'The Three Sons in Hamlet'.

[96] pp. 52, 86.

this comparison. Taking for granted that the speech of Hamlet is meant to reflect upon the roles of the central characters of the play, he goes on to suggest that Hecuba is 'obviously' Queen Gertrude, who 'would sincerely mourn' if Claudius were dead; Priam 'then' becomes not the elder Hamlet but Claudius; the 'hellish Pyrrhus must accordingly be Prince Hamlet'. (In a footnote Hathorn points out that he is the first to make this identification.) Now Pyrrhus, according to Hathorn, represents the 'Renaissance Man of Honour'. Hence, 'Hamlet is Shakespeare's pointing up of the ideal's shortcomings'. Hathorn's book is entitled Tragedy, Myth, and Mystery, but where, o where, one wonders is the mystery in all this? But Hathorn seems to have anticipated this question, and his answer is that the mystery is whether Hamlet's death 'is a herald of eternal day or a summoner to fast in fires'. It is a mystery because God's mercy is infinite but his ways unpredictable.[97]

Sven Armens (1966), however, does not think that Hamlet's ultimate fate is all that much of a mystery. He is certain that for him, as for the Moor, there were to be no flights of angels. The basis for this certainty is Armens' Jungian psychology. According to him, there are two archetypes of the family, the patriarchal and the matriarchal, and corresponding to each are certain basic attitudes. For example, the matriarchal child is 'passive', whereas the patriarchal child is 'active'. The archetypal masculine or patriarchal is symbolized as the Hero and the Father, while the archetypal feminine is symbolized as Kore and the Mother. The Jungian 'True Self' is achieved through a union of the two, but Hamlet 'fails to unite with the Kore in a bond of love, and thus, losing his soul, he falls back into the embrace of the "world dragon" '.[98]

Harry Slochower (1970) considers Hamlet not as a myth but as an example of 'mythopoesis', that is, a conscious individual creation

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[97] Hathorn, pp. 146-7, 164, 173.

[98] Archetypes of the Family in Literature, pp. 14, 122, 146-8.

which arises when 'the literal account of the legend[can] no longer be accepted'. Slochower proceeds from this idea to draw some interesting parallels between episodes in Hamlet and mythical motifs (that is, motifs found in various myths). Thus Hamlet's mission, as in all mythopoesis, is 'to rid the body politic of its diseased state'. Among specific mythical motifs pointed out are fratricide, son versus mother (e.g., Marduk and Tiamat), usurping uncle (e.g., Kans versus Krishna in Indian mythology), sea-voyage, and rescue from water. Slochower also points out that the play is full of mythic allusions 'evocative of Hamlet's own situation', and suggests that like other mythic heroes (e.g., Hercules) Hamlet can be considered to be the offspring of a union between a god (the elder Hamlet) and an ordinary mortal, Gertrude, since Hamlet's father is almost deified. Slochower also argues that the play can be divided into three acts corresponding to the three stages in the life of the mythic hero, namely, the Quest, the Journey, and the Recreation, but suggests that Hamlet is 'the first hero in mythopoesis who questions himself from the beginning, the first who fails to carry out his mission, until it no longer really matters to him'.[99]

Troilus and Cressida

There is only one article on this play that I have come across that uses the concept of myth. R. A. Foakes (1963) argues that the audience's awareness of the myth of Troy conditions its response to the play as a whole, creating, as it were, a double awareness of the characters as ordinary mortals as well as types of great warriors or beautiful women.[100] But this is a very different usage of the term myth than the one we have been concerned with in this chapter.

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[99] Mythopoesis, pp. 15, 155-7, 168-71.

[100] 'Troilus and Cressida Reconsidered', esp, pp. 153-4.

Othello

Lilian Winstanley (1922, 1924) interprets Othello as well as Lear, Macbeth, and Hamlet in terms of 'the vast body of contemporary mythology relating to the history of the time' which was common, according to her, to all the countries of Europe. Mythology in her usage means 'the method of writing in vivid metaphor', and she maintains that most of the great works of the period deal with recent history in terms of this body of commonly used metaphors. Thus Othello, in her view, is a symbolic expression of 'the Tragedy of Italy', Desdemona symbolizing Italy, which was under threat from Spain at the time, and Othello, the 'idea' of Spain. Similarly she argues that both King Lear and Macbeth should be seen as 'symbolic mythology' dealing with important recent events, such as the Darnley Murder and the St Bartholomew Massacre. Such interpretations are closest to the Euhemerist tradition of mythography (Miss Winstanley herself compares her method with the Higher Criticism of the Bible). But there is this important difference: Euhemerism sought to 'demythologize' mythology by reducing the mythical gods and heroes to ordinary historical mortals; Miss Winstanley's purpose, on the other hand, is to raise rather than lower the status of the individual work. As she writes with reference to Othello, Shakespeare's subject 'is a human story of human interest, a real story taken from real life; but it is also a story which is made the symbol of a national destiny'.[101]

Othello has also been discussed by several critics in terms of the Christian myth, Othello usually being taken to represent Everyman or Adam or Judas, Iago, Satan or the Serpent, and Desdemona, Christ.[102] A full equational model of the play has been built up by Hugh Brown (1930), who considers Othello as a parallel to the Divine Drama of the Christian

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[101] "Othello" as the Tragedy of Italy, pp. 12, 30-1, 36, 50, 61 ff. See also, Macbeth, King Lear and Contemporary History, pp. 3, 10, passim.

[102] Cf. Robert B. Heilman, Magic in the Web; Battenhouse, Shakespearean Tragedy; Bryant, Hippolyta's View; S. L. Bethell, 'Shakespeare's Imagery : The Diabolic Images in Othello'.

scheme of the world. The simplest way to present Brown's interpretation is to tabulate his equations:

God the Father	=	Shakespeare's imagination
Devil	=	'the Adversary'
Christ	=	the Heroine
Man	=	Othello
Holy Spirit	=	Shakespeare's inner personal spirit, 'awakened to full knowledge of himself by the death of the Beloved', but not incarnated
The Wicked	=	Iago
The Gentile	=	Emilia

I have deliberately put the figures that would normally be the signified on the left hand side of the equations, which is usually reserved for the signifiers, because, according to Brown, it is not the study of theology that throws light on Othello, but rather 'the best approach to systematic theology is through the study of dramatic creation, and particularly the creation of Othello'.[103] We can here see the concept of myth operative in another sense (although Brown does not use the term). The work of art is given the same status as the religious scriptures or myths and used as the basis of theology.

Maud Bodkin (1934) examines Iago in terms of the 'devil archetype' as the 'shadow-side of Othello'. She links this up with the idea that tragedy represents a conflict between assertive and submissive impulses, which in turn is related to our ambivalent attitude toward our parents. According to her the theme of the conflict between generations is also central to Hamlet and Lear.[104]

Beryl Pogson (1950) interprets the play in terms of occult doctrine. The handkerchief, she suggests, is the symbol of Othello's divine origin and his fate is woven into it. She interprets Iago as the divine Tempter testing Othello. Miss Pogson also refers to the Zohar to explain 'the occult meaning of the kiss' with which Othello dies.

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[103] Hugh Brown, 'The Divine Drama', esp. pp. 149-51.

[104] Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, pp. 217ff., 244-5.

She concludes:

> In depicting the death of the hero at his own hand, by his own will, for the purpose of union with his spiritual Self on a higher plane, Shakespeare is here following in the tradition of the Drama of the Mysteries, where the candidate suffers the Mystical Death as a Prelude to Re-Birth. The sword on which Othello is pierced by his own will is the symbol of the Cross. He slays himself on the altar, as it were, of Desdemona's body, "upon a kiss" which is the sign of spiritual union.[105]

Honor Matthews links the play with the romances by suggesting that as in those plays a person of the younger generation becomes the reconciler and restorer of order. This young person in the play is Cassio, who is like a 'son' to Othello. Finally, David Kaula (1966) points out that Othello, 'like the standard mythic hero', achieves eminence by tracing his progress 'from slavery, dangerous exploits, and exposure to monsters and wild landscape' up to Brabantio's drawing-room.[106]

King Lear

In the criticism of Lear we once again find myth criticism emerging from source studies. In his introduction to the Temple edition of the play (1895), Sir Israel Gollancz traces the story to Celtic legend, and beyond that 'in the more remote realm of simple nature myths'. In a footnote to this, Gollancz mentions, without naming, 'some Celtic folk-lorists' according to whom 'Lir', the prototype of Lear in the Celtic legends, represents the sea-god, Neptune. The two evil daughters, in this view, represent 'the rough winds' and Cordelia, 'the gentle Zephyr'. Gollancz comments on this: 'I know of no better commentary on the tempestuous character of the play; Shakespeare has unconsciously divined the germ of the myth.'[107] As already pointed out, the idea that

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[105] Beryl Pogson, In the East My Pleasure Lies, pp. 16, 19, 22.

[106] Matthews, p. 174; David Kaula, 'Othello Possessed', p. 116.

[107] p. ix.

Shakespeare somehow managed to grasp the essential mythic import of the stories that served him as sources recurs among commentators. Other examples of it are in the comments of Freud on the theme of the three caskets and William Archer's reference to the myth behind Romeo and Juliet.

> The play has been related to the 'Oedipus motive' (in a non-Freudian sense) in an article in Poet Lore in 1899. This Oedipus motive is in turn related to solar myth because 'to-day's sun is the child of yesterday's sun and kills it in order to live'.[108]

Charles Creighton (1912), like Lilian Winstanley later, interprets the play in a manner which corresponds to Euhemerism in the interpretation of myths. I mention it here because of the obvious, though implicit, assumption behind it that the play ought to be interpreted as a myth. The search for symbolism in the story is justified by Bacon's canon:

> 'It may pass for a farther indication of a concealed and secret meaning, that some of these fables are so absurd and idle in their narration as to show and proclaim an allegory even afar off'. According to Bacon, the purpose of allegory in parables is to instruct as well as to conceal. 'Let this,' writes Creighton, 'be our encouragement to go on searching for something below the surface of Shakespeare's recension of the Lear legend.' Creighton then goes on to suggest that the play 'is an allegory of the Reformation in its peculiarly English form', with the characters representing actual historical figures. The details are not relevant to our discussion.[109]

Freud's comments on the play have already been briefly referred to in the discussion of The Merchant of Venice. Cordelia, according to Freud, represents Death, one of the three forms in which woman confronts man, and he compares the scene in which Lear carries her

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[108] Poet-Lore, 11 (1899), p. 109.

[109] An Allegory of King Lear, pp. 7-8.

dead in his arms to the Valkyrie carrying the hero dead from the battle-field, the latter situation being reversed in the former in accordance with the demands of wish-fulfilment. Freud also suggests, like Israel Gollancz and others, that Shakespeare manages 'a reduction of the theme to the original myth' which recaptures the 'moving significance' that had been lost by distortion in the other versions. It is this 'return to the original' that creates that profound effect that the play has upon us.[110] 'Return to the original' is as good a description of the mythic mode of thinking as any that has been put forward, and we can see how Freud himself is returning us to the original, but transferred from the heavens to our own unconscious. By thus relating the play to the 'original' theme he recreates the mystery that the original must have had. It remains an open question, however, whether the mystery would have been there in Shakespeare's play without this pointing out of it. One of the ways in which the priest endows an object with mana is to relate it to the time of origins. A story or theme is endowed with mystery or mana in a similar manner by relating it to original myths. The poet or dramatist can himself, of course, play the role of the priest, as it were, with regard to his story or theme, but it seems that very often it needs commentators like Freud to do it. In fact, where the poet tries too hard to endow his theme with the mana of myths he very often only succeeds in being pretentious or dull, which is what happens, perhaps, to T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land. Empirically speaking, the evoking of mystery is best left to the myth critic and the unconscious.

Janet Spens (1916) and Sarah Anne Davidson (1931) interpret the play in terms of scapegoat and vegetation rituals and are best discussed in the next chapter.

F. Hiebel (1940) interprets the play in the light of 'anthroposophy'. He writes:

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[110] Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', p. 300.

> The very essence of the consciousness-soul appears in King Lear in the form of a mythical mystery-play. In every old fairy-story the king with his three princesses represents the state of the human soul and the king's youngest child always shows the salient point of future development.[111]

Geoffrey L. Bickersteth (1946) tries to explain the 'golden' effect of the play in terms of the theme of the transmutation of and victory over evil or suffering as symbolized in the myths of Prometheus and Christ, Lear resembling Prometheus and Cordelia, Christ.[112]

J.I.M. Stewart, writing in 1949, observes that the first anthropologist to approach Lear (and Stewart suggests that he had not yet arrived) would, on observing how paternal figures in the play are deprived by their children, 'aver that these incidents are symbolical as such things in dreams are symbolical:they veil an unconscious fantasy of the kind classically expressed in the myth of Uranus and Cronus'. Shortly before this Stewart remarks that there is 'something unmistakably atavistic about the play'.[113] Once again we have the idea that Shakespeare's treatment of his sources represents a 'return to the original'.

The folk-tale nature of the story of Lear has been often remarked. In fact one type of folk-tale is named after this play. The subplot of the play is also of a familiar folk type, namely, the 'expulsion and return type'. Remarking on the widespread prevalence of the type of folk-tale to which Lear belongs, Arpad Pauncz (1954) suggests that the name 'Lear complex' could be given to a congeries of complexes which appears in literature and life in the relationships between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, young women and ageing men, and in

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[111] F. Hiebel, Shakespeare and the Awakening of Modern Consciousness, p. 35.

[112] 'The Golden World of King Lear', pp. 169-70.

[113] Character and Motive in Shakespeare, p. 21.

the rivalry between fathers and sons for young women.[114] Lear thus acquires a mythical status as the ideal, archetypal (though not the prototypical) representation of certain universal unconscious emotions.

Richmond Hathorn (1962) has written a far more interesting essay on this play than the one on Hamlet already referred to. He argues that Shakespeare is concerned in this play with refuting certain naturalistic 'equations', but that he does this by having recourse to three myths 'at least'. (That 'at least' I find rather amusing.) The false naturalistic equations are: that words are equal to things (logic); that things are equal to things (causality); and that human beings are equal to things (analysis). Against these equations Shakespeare confronts, according to Hathorn, respectively, the mythic motifs of the Riddle, the 'Debasement of the King', and the 'Duel with the Unknown Champion'. The Ordeal of the Riddle refutes the logical equation because it emphasizes the mystery of the word; the ritual debasement of the king refutes the causal equation because, if I understand Hathorn rightly, the mock king both is and is not the king; the third naturalistic equation, according to Hathorn, is refuted by the Duel with the Unknown Champion, who strikes a blow for heavenly justice and shows that mere patient suffering, in accordance with the Stoic-Cynic doctrine of autarkeia, is not enough. Hathorn also relates the Gloucester-Edgar plot to initiation myths. In this connexion he refers to a book by Guiseppe Cocchiara (La Legenda de Re Lear) in which the motif of the sacrifice of the younger son is traced to initiation rites and seasonal festivals. Hathorn writes:

> Estrangement between father and son, hint of father's supersession by the son, the wandering of the son in the wilderness, the meeting with a "wild man" or spirit in the wilderness, the abasement of the father, and the final reconciliation: all these are relics of initiation-myths, as shown by Cocchiara.[115]

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[114] Coote Lake, p. 307; Arpad Pauncz, 'The Lear Complex in World Literature'.

[115] Hathorn, pp. 177-93, 268.

Honor Matthews (1962) argues that although the play is primarily about Lear's personal fall and redemption, yet viewed from another angle it is also concerned with the redemption of a community. Again, the hero-figure is split, with Edmund doing the job of destroying the 'old year' and thus allowing Edgar to succeed the old king without staining his hands with blood. Warren Stevenson (1965), on the other hand, considers that it is Albany who is the archetypal saviour, 'pointing to the spiritual reintegration not merely of the British people, but of mankind'. Three reasons are suggested for this view of Albany 'as a figure with mythic and symbolic overtones': Albany is related to Albion, who was the giant son of Neptune and hence a symbol for Britain; he lacks individuality (hence, he is symbolic); and finally, there is a parallel between a speech of Albany (IV.2.46) and a speech by God in Everyman. None of these reasons, I suspect, will strike those who are not already determined to see archetypes everywhere as very compelling. Sven Armens (1966) sees the play, within the framework of his Jungian psychology, as dealing with the patriarchal Lear's redemption through the sacrifice of Cordelia, the 'mother figure of the physical hearth'. Albany and Edgar are both, according to Armens (in opposition to Miss Matthews and Stevenson), figures of unregenerate 'solar patriarchy'.[116]

Judging from the various discussions of the play outlined above, then, King Lear would seem to be rather full of saviour figures, with Edgar, Albany, and Cordelia all staking their claim to the title of the Saviour-Hero, whether as sun-god or Zephyr, or the spirit of England, or Christ, or the Great Mother Goddess.

Macbeth

We have seen King Lear interpreted as a nature myth, and we also observed how Freud (and other psychoanalytical critics) interpreted the nature myth itself as an expression of unconscious emotions and

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[116] Matthews, p. 171; Warren Stevenson, 'Albany as Archetype in King Lear', p. 262; Armens, pp. 174, 183.

desires. The early psychoanalysts like Freud, Otto Rank, Theodor Reik, Hanns Sachs, and others show a great deal of interest in primitive myths and rituals, and use the concept of myth as an allegory of natural phenomena as the starting point for their own very different allegorical interpretations. The connexion of Jung with this naturalistic tradition of myth-interpretation is even more obvious, as I tried to show in the first chapter. Macbeth has also been interpreted as a nature myth, and this interpretation has been extended by the psychoanalytical critics.

Karl Simrock (1870) traced the origin of the episode of Birnam Wood to nature myth and the ritual of renouveau through the intermediary of German folk tale, especially the legend of King Grünewald, in which there is an episode of a moving forest. Simrock writes:

> In my Manual of German Mythology, p. 557, is shown that the legend of the moving forest originated in the German religious custom of May festivals, or Summer-welcomings, and that "King Grunewald" is originally a Winter-giant, whose dominion ceases when the May-feast begins and the green-wood draws nigh. This is the mythical basis of the Macbeth legend.

Simrock also relates Macduff, with respect to his manner of birth, to legends from several cultures and concludes: 'And in many other instances heroes and demi-gods were similarly ushered into the world, and it always implied power and heroic strength'.[117] Simrock's suggestion has been followed up by several critics,[118] especially psychoanalysts, and I shall now mention two of them.

Ludwig Jekels (1917, 1936) tries to combine the mythic view of the play with the psychological, not, I think, without some success. Taking up the nature myth that Simrock had seen in the play, he relates it to Freud's observation that the play is concerned with the theme of

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[117] Simrock, Die Quellen des Shakespeare, quoted in the New Variorum edition of the play, reprinted (New York, 1963), pp. 398-9.

[118] Cf., e.g., Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare, p. 520; Matthews, p. 165; Norman Holland, 'Macbeth as Hibernal Giant'.

fertility and barrenness, and also to the theme of the son's rivalry with his father. The play, he suggests, presents the tragic realization that a bad son (Macbeth being a bad 'son' to Duncan) is also a bad father. Jekels also suggests that it is Macduff, not Macbeth, who is the true hero of the play, and attempts to relate the play to Shakespeare's life and to certain historical facts like Elizabeth's barrenness and James's being the son of a murdered woman, just as Malcolm is the son of a murdered man.[119]

Hanns Sachs (1921) carries this idea forward. Noting that the problem of childlessness runs through the play, he writes:

> In this complex the old nature myth personified in the tragedy, namely the victory of spring coming with green branches over the sterile winter, coincides with the actual event, the accession of James I as successor of the sterile Elizabeth who had beheaded his mother. Freud makes it probable also that the night-wandering of Lady Macbeth goes back directly to the last weeks spent in sleepless disquietude of the virgin queen who once called herself in grief a fruitless stock.[120]

Roy Walker and Honor Matthews have both discerned the nature myth of Simrock in the play, but they have christianized it. Roy Walker (1949) writes that the murder of Duncan and its consequences are 'profoundly impregnated with the central tragedy of the Christian myth'. Duncan, he suggests, is like Christ, and Macbeth like Judas. Macbeth is also Satan in this view, and Walker suggests that the third murderer of Banquo is Macbeth himself and that he is there in order to suggest that the three together make a kind of unholy trinity. In brief, according to Walker, 'Shakespeare has taken a religious myth and Christianized it'. Honor Matthews also discusses the fertility theme in the play and

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[119] Ludwig Jekels, Selected Papers. See the chapters entitled 'The Riddle of Shakespeare's Macbeth' and 'The Psychology of the Festival of Christmas'. The first of these appeared first in 1917 and the second, in 1936.

[120] Hanns Sachs, The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, II (1921), 98.

in fact suggests that 'men's ancient faith in the recurrent miracle of Spring is given direct presentation in English literary drama for the first time'. But this 'pagan symbol of fertility', according to Miss Matthews, is combined with 'Shakespeare's strongest dramatization of the Christian Doomsday theme'. Macbeth, in short, is 'Shakespeare's Christmas play'. Miss Matthews refers here to the 'well known stage direction in the Coventry Nativity Pageant: ' . . . "Mary and Joseph goeth clean away" ' and relates it to 'Fleance is 'scaped' in Macbeth. I have already mentioned her observation that Shakespeare has split the hero-figure into Macduff and Malcolm, so that while one of them does the slaying, the other takes over the reign of Scotland.[121]

H. C. Goddard (1951) describes the play as Shakespeare's 'Descent into Hell', refers to the Grünewald myth, and remarks that the delphic prophecies are a symbol of the unconscious. Norman Holland (1960) relates the nature myth discovered by Simrock to the imagery of the play, noting that Macbeth 'fairly bristles with images of vegetation'. He also suggests that Shakespeare may have come to the primitive ritual and myth pattern through the mediation of Elizabethan folk customs. Finally, Harry Morris (1961) applies the fourfold method of interpretation to the play and, not surprisingly, comes to the conclusion that the Porter in Dante's anagogical sense becomes the 'warder of hell itself', that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth represent the experience of being in Cocytus, and that Seyton is meant to recall his more famous counterpart, Satan.[122]

The discovery of the mythic pattern in the play raises, I think, one of the major problems in our approach to Shakespeare. The patterns are undoubtedly there; the motifs of spring versus winter; sterility versus fertility; the immaculately conceived hero, his exile and return;

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[121] Roy Walker, The Time is Free : A Study of Macbeth, pp. 55, 107-8, 195, 221; Matthews, pp. 165, 170.

[122] Goddard, pp. 498, 504, 520; Holland, 'Macbeth as Hibernal Giant'; Harry Morris, reported in The Shakespeare Newsletter (February, 1962), p. 3.

riddling prophecy; the conflict between generations; and so on. But at the same time one feels that the central preoccupation of the play is not explained in terms of these mythic patterns, for, after all, the play is primarily dealing with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. To consider Macduff (together, I should think, with Malcolm) as the hero might be justified with reference to the pattern of the hero myths, but we still have to remember that the central characters are not these but Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Northrop Frye takes the extreme view that the play makes sense only if one considers it as dealing with the ritualistic theme of killing the king rather than with the moral crime of murder.[123] What makes this description too simplistic and partial is, I think, the important fact that we are made to see so much in the play through Macbeth's consciousness. The mythic pattern is there, no doubt, but what makes it, in a sense, irrelevant is the presence of Macbeth as a thinking subject rather than as a mere function of the ritual plot. It has been the fashion in the criticism of the play since Bradley, in reaction against his kind of character analysis, to emphasize as key passages things like the image of the temple-haunting martlet, the description of the King's Evil, and so on. But surely the most memorable passages in the play are not these but those dealing with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's responses before and after the murder, passages evoking with such psychological acuteness the feelings of apprehension, guilt, futility, and despair? This is irrelevant, it seems to me, to the mythic pattern (unless its intention is to subvert that pattern) just as the mythic pattern is irrelevant to it. (Similarly the emphasis on Richard III in the play with his name is irrelevant to the myth of Adonis and other dying gods that Norman Holland discerns beneath the surface plot.) It is always possible, of course, to argue that Shakespeare manages to synthesize the mythic and the realistic, but that seems to be an inevitable cliché that goes with the myth of perfection and possible only with the benefit of the hindsight of more than three centuries. It could be much more plausibly argued, I think, that the art of Shakespeare and other

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[123] Frye, A Natural Perspective, p. 62.

Elizabethans is, in the words of T. S. Eliot, 'an impure art', without necessarily endorsing Eliot's objection to it.[124]

Antony and Cleopatra

The Roman tragedies have not attracted the myth-prone critic as much as the other tragedies and comedies. Nevertheless, there are a few interpretations that come within the scope of this essay. Alan Warner (1957) suggests that the universal appeal of this play is due to the fact that 'Shakespeare has dramatized a variation of a theme that is deeply rooted in myth and legend, the ruin of the strong man by his sexual weakness'. The conflict in the play links it to the legends of Tammuz and Ishtar, Adam and Eve, Samson and Delilah, and Hercules and Omphale. All these, Warner suggests, are variations on what Maud Bodkin would call the archetype of 'woman as the betrayer and enslaver of man'. Warner warns, however, that it would be wrong to read the play as a simple moral lesson against lust.[125]

Raymond Waddington (1966), employing the typological method of mythography, suggests that the play is really about the 'mythical and cosmological affairs of Mars and Venus' rather than about Hercules and Omphale or Isis, as has been suggested by others. But, Waddington points out, these latter figures are subsumed typologically under the figures of Mars and Venus. This implies a different view of the love affair than the moral condemnatory one, and in fact Waddington argues that through this major mythical reference Shakespeare manages to raise his lovers' passions 'to the status of elemental life forces'. Not only that, but the maternal image of 'the baby at the breast' suggests, according to Waddington, 'the fabled progeny, Harmony, that is to be the product of this wedding of spirits'.[126] It is with a shock that one

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[124] Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 114.

[125] Alan Warner, 'A Note on Antony and Cleopatra'.

[126] 'Antony and Cleopatra : "What Venus did with Mars" ', pp. 210, 222-4.

remembers after this that the baby at the breast is only a 'poor worm' !

Harold Fisch (1970) suggests that in this play Shakespeare manages to evolve a syncretic myth by blending two groups of mythical figures together: Venus-Mars-Bacchus and Isis-Osiris-Seth. This blending had precedents in Renaissance mythography, Osiris having similarities to Bacchus, and Isis being the prototype of Venus and other similar goddesses. But this composite myth is set within a critical perspective by being juxtaposed to 'vigorous Biblical realism' as reflected in the speech of the clown. The play is thus not merely a mythologization of the central characters but mythologization within a critical perspective, or rather, the mythologization is not Shakespeare's but the characters', and Shakespeare is concerned to expose the illusory and escapist quality of this mythologizing. Fisch might have said in simpler words that Shakespeare wants us to think that when Antony and Cleopatra are making their grandiose speeches they are merely kidding themselves in a 'dream world of Paganism'.[127] This is a familiar and respectable view of the play which does not, perhaps, require the laborious research into Renaissance mythography that Fisch's approach would seem to require.

All the three examples mentioned in this section are rather different from much of the myth criticism that we have been recounting in this chapter. They claim to have greater historical authority since they relate the explicit and oblique mythical references in the plays to Renaissance interpretations of the myths. We must remember however that even Wigston's interpretations of the plays proceeds from a knowledge of Bacon's mythography, which does not prevent him from being rather eccentric in his interpretations. The key question is, of course, how central is the mythical allusion in our total response to the play, how long, after its occurrence does it continue, in the words

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[127] Fisch, 'Antony and Cleopatra : The Limits of Mythology', pp. 59, 64.

of Richard Knowles, 'to reverberate'.[128] As in the imagery approach, this kind of myth criticism gives the illusion that the metaphorical-mythic structure we are unearthing can be attributed to Shakespeare's intention, whereas the only certainty is that this structure is our own construct in our attempt to grasp the play as a unity and can be judged as valuable or useless only on the basis of its unifying function. The usual kind of myth criticism does not, of course, make any claims that it is unearthing Shakespeare's conscious intention, but this should not, I think, be allowed to obscure its similarity to the 'historical' kind of myth criticism that we have just seen. Both are concerned with developing useful analogies that would unify our perception of the plays. But sometimes, one feels, the unity lies only in the inner structure of the analogical pattern to which the play is being related.

Timon of Athens

I have not seen any discussion of this play in terms of myth. But there is an article which argues that Timon is a failed alchemist. Since the purpose of alchemy was a kind of spiritual transformation (= rebirth), the play may thus be seen as presenting the opposite of the myth and ritual pattern.[129]

Coriolanus

I have not come across any myth criticism of this play either. But H. C. Goddard and Otto Rank have cited the image of the state as an organism (I.1.94) as an instance of mythical thought.[130]

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[128] Richard Knowles, 'Myth and Type in As You Like It, p. 7.

[129] 'Alchemy and Timon of Athens', reported in The Shakespeare Newsletter (February, 1971), p. 10.

[130] Goddard, p. 623; Rank cited in Norman Holland, Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare, pp. 161-2.

The Romances

The Romances as a group have been thought to be most amenable to the myth and ritual approach. This is partly because their plots seem to share some of the inconsequentiality of mythical plots. Douglas Bush (1959) has suggested that in the last plays we can see Shakespeare creating his own myths rather than merely using classical and other myths for ornamental or structural purposes. G. Wilson Knight (1929) has called the last plays 'myths of immortality'. D. G. James (1937) also suggests that in the last plays Shakespeare was trying to construct his own mythology, although, according to James, he did not and could not succeed. In this James is in opposition to the view of Knight. E. M. W. Tillyard (1938) relates the plays to the final phase of the archetypal pattern of 'prosperity, destruction, and recreation'. Earlier (1916), Janet Spens had also suggested that the last plays present a solution to the problems of the tragedies. These plays present, according to her, a reconciliation of man with nature, and it is only through such reconciliation that the problem of the individual's death can be solved. The death of the individual is tragic; only when all life is regarded as one is consolation possible. Richard Wincor (1950) describes the romances as Shakespeare's 'Festival Plays' and relates them to the drama of seasonal rituals. But he suggests that it is the broad themes of the rituals rather than their ceremonial details that are usually presented in these plays. The implications of such drama, according to Wincor, are what he terms 'Dream', 'Hope of Immortality', and 'Reconciliation'.[131] But the first critic to take the last plays as a group, to defend the integrity of their texts, and to interpret them as myths of immortality, reconciliation, rebirth, or what you will, is, as far as I am aware, W. F. C. Wigston, whose book A New Study of Shakespeare first appeared in 1884, and to which I have already referred several times. The broad outline of this

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[131] Douglas Bush, 'Classical Myth in Shakespeare's Plays', p. 85; Knight, The Crown of Life, p. 30; D. G. James, Scepticism and Poetry, Ch. 7, 'The Failure of the Ballad-Makers'; Tillyard, Shakespeare's Last Plays, p. 26; Janet Spens, An Essay on Shakespeare's Relation to Tradition, pp. 101-2; Richard Wincor, 'Shakespeare's Festival Plays'.

picture of Shakespeare's development, in which the last plays are seen as dramas which reconcile all the tensions of the tragedies and the problem plays was also anticipated, as has been pointed out, by Dowden (1877), who described this last period as one of serenity that comes from being 'on the Heights'. The biographical extension of this that we find in Dowden has not found favour in the twentieth century, but this should not be allowed, I think, to obscure the basic similarity between the maps of Shakespeare's development drawn by Dowden and by the twentieth-century 'myth and ritual critics' like G. Wilson Knight and others.[132] Wigston and Dowden can therefore be said to anticipate the major themes of twentieth century myth and ritual criticism. 'Anticipate', however, is, I think, an understatement.

There is, of course, no unanimity in the interpretation of the last plays, even among the myth critics themselves. I have already referred to D. G. James's argument that in the last plays Shakespeare inevitably fails to create a new mythology. Herbert Weisinger (who has written more about the myth and ritual approach than practical criticism applying this approach, and who is subject to periods of doubts regarding its usefulness) argues:

> On the basis of a comparison between the myth and ritual pattern as I have described it in Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall and the tragedies, I think that Shakespeare's tragic vision, which he was able to sustain but tentatively in Hamlet, most fully in Othello, barely in King Lear, and hardly at all in Macbeth, failed him altogether in the last plays, and that his failure is manifested by the use of the elements of the myth and ritual pattern as mere machinery, virtually in burlesque fashion, and not as their informing and sustaining spirit.[133]

The idea of the last plays as 'fables of reconciliation' has also come

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[132] Edward Dowden, Shakespeare, pp. 47-8. Weisinger's comment on Dowden's similarity to modern myth criticism is cited in note 5 above.

[133] Weisinger, 'The Myth and Ritual Approach to Shakespearean Tragedy', p. 144; see also 'Myth, Method, and Shakespeare', p. 48.

under attack from different quarters. F. R. Leavis in a caveat on the criticism of the last plays suggested that The Tempest at least was realistic in tone. Frank Kermode has found in the same play a certain 'coldness of tone' which would be the very opposite of reconciliation. Jan Kott has gone even further and described the play as 'a great Renaissance tragedy of lost illusions'. It is also possible to emphasize without distortion the realistic elements in The Winter's Tale and Cymbeline. Discussing the symbolic-mythic interpretations of the last plays, Philip Edwards (1958) argues:

> A 'balanced view of life' becomes the mist-hidden crag which is the goal of human striving . . .
>
> The reduction of the complexity of Shakespeare to a striving towards a balanced view of life seems to me typical of the pallidness of all interpretations of the last plays which insist that they are symbolic utterances. There is an appearance (there is certainly a claim) that depths are being opened, riches are being revealed. But it is an appearance only.

The ideas discovered, Professor Edwards goes on to say, are 'banal, trite, and colourless'. More recently, G. K. Hunter has also criticized the idea that the last plays are merely about reconciliation. He writes:

> Their relation to the later tragedies suggests a different view; the capacity to accept the world-as-it-is has had to be bought by a sacrifice of heroic pretensions, by a loss of confidence in the heroic individual. In reading the Last Plays we should feel the sense of this loss even as we rejoice in the sweetness of their reconciliation.[134]

It is important, I think, to bear these dissentient opinions (assuming that the contrary view is the orthodoxy) in mind as we go on to document interpretations of these plays in terms of mythic patterns. For if such interpretations do not convince where obviously 'mythic' plays are concerned, their relevance to the understanding of the other plays of Shakespeare must be deemed to be rather slight.

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[134] Leavis, 'The Criticism of Shakespeare's Last Plays', p. 344; Kermode, Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne, p. 256; Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, p. 266; Edwards, 'Shakespeare's Romances : 1900-1957', p. 11; Hunter, 'The Last Tragic Heroes', p. 28.

Pericles

Wigston considers this play as an 'early attempt to embody the same subject matter as forms the main element of The Winter's Tale'. This subject matter is described as that of separation, lost child, and the harmony of rediscovery. Marina is compared to Persephone, and the detail of Marina appearing with a basket of flowers (IV.i.) shortly before the attempted murder and the kidnapping of her by the pirates is made to fit nicely with the rape of Persephone 'picking flowers'. Thaisa is, of course, explicitly associated with Diana in the play, but Wigston goes on to actually identify her with that deity and remarks that Ephesus, where she is washed ashore, was a centre of 'all the secret knowledge of the Gnostics', whose teachings were passed on to the Rosicrucians and the Hermetic Brethren of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[135]

The play occupies an important position in G. Wilson Knight's criticism. His first important critical work was entitled 'Thaisa : An Essay on Myth and Allegory in Shakespeare's Final Plays' (1928). It was not published, but T. S. Eliot may have read it, and his 'Marina' seems to have been influenced by Knight's criticism of the final plays. He in fact sent a copy of the poem to Wilson Knight with the inscription: 'To G. Wilson Knight with, I hope, some appropriateness'.[136] Knight is inclined to think of Pericles as his discovery (which is not entirely justified if we think of Wigston). In fact he considers that one of his two major contributions to Shakespeare-criticism 'was the recognition of the death-reversals in Pericles and The Winter's Tale as dramatic equivalents to a truth beyond tragedy', the other contribution being his theory of the 'spatial' form of the plays.[137] But in spite of this, his comments on the plays are rather predictable -- after Wigston. In Myth

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[135] Wigston, pp. 7, 23-4, 37-8.

[136] The typescript of 'Thaisa', along with the copy of 'Marina' sent by Eliot to Knight and some other material, has been deposited in the Shakespeare Memorial Library in the Central Reference Library, Birmingham.

[137] Shakespeare and Religion, pp. 306-7.

and Miracle he points out the common motifs in this play and The Winter's Tale and writes that 'a reader sensitive to poetic atmosphere must necessarily feel the awakening light of some religious or metaphysical truth symbolized in the plot and attendant machinery of these two plays'. He further describes Pericles as a 'myth in the Platonic sense', dealing with 'some mystic apprehension of a life that conquers death'.[138]

Cymbeline

The folk-tale and mythic origins of this play are quite obvious. Simrock remarked on the parallel between this play and the story of Snow White in that in both there is apparent death from poison contrived by an evil step-mother.[139] I have myself mentioned the parallel between Guiderius and Arviragus and Lava and Kusha, the twin sons of Rama in the Indian epic Ramayana.[140]

Wigston, in his rather exuberant fashion, comes up with several mythical analogies and hidden themes in the play. (He also defends the authenticity of the vision of Jupiter as Shakespeare's 'oracle' -- a defence not very different in its broad argument from Wilson Knight's in his chapter on the play in The Crown of Life.) Wigston suggests that Iachimo (=Iacchus) is Dionysos Chthonios, a divinity of the underworld for a season, who 'sleeps in the sacred abode of Persephone'. Persephone is, of course, Imogen, to whom Iachimo goes in a chest in the manner of Dionysus and Adonis, who were both 'Chested Gods'. Imogen is also compared with Diana, who is only another form of Persephone. Wigston writes:

> In Cymbeline we have Imogen, seeking her husband, with text allusions to a monument and to Diana's deer. Diana, as Proserpine, typified the sleeping power of the earth during winter. She is, therefore, closely connected with death. Her

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[138] The Crown of Life, pp. 14-17.

[139] Quoted by Hanns Sachs, The Creative Unconscious, p. 80.

[140] See the section on Much Ado above.

> reconciling power is the reconciliation that belongs to the immortality of Nature, that gives back what it takes away, through the grave.[141]

Wigston makes other mythic identifications which are rather difficult to follow, but the important point about his interpretation is the idea of the theme of rebirth and reconciliation associated with seasonal myths, especially the myths of Dionysus and Persephone. He never ceases to reiterate this idea, and considering the importance of this theme in recent myth criticism we will have to, as E.A.J. Honigmann suggests, grant him the status of the pioneer of this approach.

Beryl Pogson (1950) interprets the play as presenting the theme of initiation or spiritual rebirth, Imogen being a symbol of 'the Spiritual Consciousness attainable by Man' and Posthumus, of the final or 'Ultimate Man'. The phrase 'Widow's Son' applied to Posthumus is, according to Miss Pogson, 'a recognized term for a candidate for Initiation or spiritual Re-birth'. 'Thus,' she writes, 'he follows in the train of Perceval and a long line of Initiates in Esoteric Legend in the tradition of the Son of Isis. The surname Leonatus implies that his father had reached the Lion Degree of Mithraism -- and this fits in with the traces of Mithraism which are in harmony with the characteristics of Roman Britain suggested in the background of the play.' Miss Pogson also mentions with approval the equation of Imogen with the story of Snow-White, which she describes as the 'old esoteric fairy tale' in which the phrase 'living happily ever after' is full of esoteric meaning.[142]

Finally, William Barry Thorne (1969) relates the drama to the mummers' play and other folk rituals of renouveau and suggests that the primary objective of the plot is to point out 'love's regenerative quality', which is here distributed, in contrast with the early comedies, 'ritualistically to the community at large'.[143]

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[141] Wigston, pp. 335-8, 340 f.

[142] Pogson, In the East My Pleasure Lies, pp. 48, 53-5.

[143] 'Cymbeline : "Lopp'd Branches" and the Concept of Regeneration', p. 146.

The Winter's Tale

Comparison of the play with the Alcestis myth was drawn by W. W. Lloyd in 1856.[144] The play is one of the most important texts in Wigston's book, many of his ideas being illustrated from it. Wigston remarks that no one had till then (1884) noticed the 'extraordinary parallel presented between Perdita and Persephone (or Proserpine), and between Hermione and Demeter (or Ceres)'. He suggests that the parallel is complete even in the title. In this connexion he quotes from George Cox's Mythology of the Aryan Nations that 'this story [of Persephone] is naturally found in all lands where the difference between Summer and Winter is sufficiently marked to leave on the mind the impression of death and resurrection'. Cox, we must remember, was a 'solar mythologist', and his bringing together of the theme of the change of the seasons and the idea of death and rebirth points to the essential similarity of solar mythology and the interpretation of myths and rituals in terms of the Eniautos Daimon or the vegetation deity that we find in Frazer, Jane Harrison, and others. Both may be said to belong to the very ancient tradition of allegorical exegesis of mythology as descriptions of natural phenomena. In relating this myth to the Eleusinian mysteries, Wigston anticipates another important preoccupation of Jane Harrison and some myth and ritual critics, notably Colin Still. The myth of Persephone, Wigston observes, is central to the mysteries and to the play. In fact, he suggests, the myth is a 'Winter's Tale'.

Wigston derives his mythological ideas from those Casaubon-like figures of the nineteenth century who belong to the allegorical-syncretic tradition that I outlined in the first chapter, figures like Bochart, Bryant, and Creuzer, to all of whom Wigston refers. As in some of them, notably Cox (though one should not forget the interpretation of the Persephone myth in Bacon's Wisdom of the Ancients, which is also used by Wigston), the 'key to all mythology' is discovered in the theme

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[144] Quoted in the New Variorum edition of the play, reprinted (New York, 1964), pp. 357-8.

of the conflict between summer and winter, which in turn is supposed to be only a symbolic way of presenting the more fundamental theme of death and rebirth. Like the mythographers, Wigston takes up the task of identification of mythical figures (as well as literary and fairy-tale figures) with great enthusiasm. I do not always follow all these identifications, partly because of the inadequacies of my own classical and mythological scholarship, but they are roughly as follows. Leontes = Cadmus, because Cadmus is a sun god and Leontes is associated with the lion sign of the zodiac. And Cadmus, according to Bochart and Bryant, is the same as Osiris. Hermione is equated with Harmonia, wife of Cadmus. Camillo is held to be a subordinate deity connected with Harmonia and Cadmus, and Polixenes is equated with Polynices. The quarrel between Leontes and Polixenes is interpreted as the antinomy of light and darkness, mind and matter, truth and error. Finally, the analogy with the Eleusinian mysteries is further elaborated in the comparison of the revelation of the statue of Hermione with that of Demeter, this latter being revealed to initiates in a burst of light as the crowning ceremony of the Eleusinian rituals.

I have chosen to emphasize the importance of Wigston in the history of myth criticism for the obvious reason that he anticipates so many of the preoccupations and ideas of later critics. Wigston also illustrates very nicely the argument that I have set forth in the first chapter, namely, that myth criticism, or a large proportion of it, owes less to the ideas of Frazer and others than to the venerable tradition of allegorical-typological exegesis of myths and the Bible. What we often refer to as myth criticism is the extension of the methods of such exegesis to works of art with the purpose of raising these works themselves to mythical status, or at least to envelop them with an aura of mystery and <u>mana</u>. Allegory itself, I have suggested, can be a <u>mana</u>-conferring device, both in its creative form as well as its interpretative one. The traditional view of allegory was that it was essential to preserve the sanctity of sacred truths by throwing over them a veil of allegory. This veil both revealed and obscured. Wigston remarks

that the aim of Shakespeare's art 'seems to have been both to obscure and reveal at once'.[145] This is precisely what the medieval allegorists thought was the function of allegory in sacred texts. The allegory hid the sacred truths so that only the initiate could grasp it. Part of the obscuring, I have suggested, is done by the exegete himself, in the very process of claiming that something is hidden. This, it seems to me, is the characteristic of myth criticism at its best -- it obscures as well as clarifies. Given a certain suspension of disbelief Wigston succeeds in this far better, I suggest, than many other routine academic critics.

The idea of the cycle of seasons has been conspicuous in comments on this play. Janet Spens (1916) compared the action with that of the Harvest Feast Play. F. C. Tinkler (1937) also considered the play, in more specific anthropological terms, as a development of the folk drama dealing with the seasonal cycle.[146]

Hanns Sachs (1942) compares one episode in the play with a motif in many folk stories in which the daughter is preferred to the mother. Sachs mentions the case of the Griselda story and writes:

> As in the Griselda story, the husband and wife cannot be reunited till the grown-up daughter comes back to her father's house and he has given her away. Morality comes into its own both in fairy-tale and drama -- that is the condition on which a thoroughly immoral unconscious phantasy is permitted a certain degree of conscious expression.[147]

David Hoeniger (1950) claims that the play has not received much attention from critics. He believes that it is only explicable as an allegory. The reason he gives for this view is exactly the same as that given by the allegorical exegetes of the Bible and the myths, namely, that 'such blatant improbabilities may well be a hint that the meaning

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[145] Wigston, pp. 7-8, passim.

[146] See the section on the romances in Ch. 7 below.

[147] The Creative Unconscious, pp. 80-1.

of the play is symbolic rather than literal'. (Are the improbabilities any more glaring, one wonders, than in Othello or Hamlet?) Hoeniger then goes on to make some interesting remarks on what he suggests are the four themes of the play: 'identity between parents and children' (Mamillius = Leontes, Perdita = Hermione, Leontes = Polixenes, Polixenes = Florizel); the theme of summer and winter, the rebirth of nature; the theme of youth-age-death and resurrection; and the theme of art and its relation to nature and to our lives. Hoeniger demonstrates the interrelations among these themes quite convincingly.[148]

Beryl Pogson (1953-6) and Paul Arnold (1953) suggest similar interpretations of the play in terms of esoteric doctrine. Miss Pogson takes up the idea of rebirth and relates it to spiritual initiation, especially as practised in the ancient mysteries. Arnold also comes to a similar interpretation, except that in referring to Bacon and to Rosicrucian and Cabalistic lore he is even closer to Wigston than Miss Pogson. His conclusion is that 'Le drame cosmique du rachat par la Vierge est accompli en sa forme gnostique'. In both their interpretation the myth of Persephone is crucial.[149]

E. A. J. Honigmann (1955) in an article to which I have already referred, draws attention to the contribution of Wigston to criticism of this play. He brings out in particular Wigston's attempt to show that the Elizabethans understood the Persephone myth much as we do today, and he himself mentions one such interpretation of the myth in the preface to a translation of Claudian's Rape of Proserpine(1617). The translator, Leonard Digges, was closely associated with Shakespeare. Professor Honigmann's conclusion is:

> If The Winter's Tale and The Tempest are twin-plays not only in handling the same themes but also in attempting the sophistication

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[148] 'The Meaning of The Winter's Tale', pp. 11, 14.

[149] Pogson, Three Plays, pp. 39-51, passim; Arnold, 'Ésotérisme du Conte D'Hiver', p. 512.

> of myth (in the tradition of Lyly's Endimion and so on), Wigston's views fit into the framework of the most modern speculation about Shakespeare's artistic purposesat the end of his career.[150]

J. A. Bryant, proceeding from the assumption (which, not surprisingly, is presented as the conclusion) that Shakespeare's plays are 'explorations of mythic fragments, whereby the movement of the fable at hand, whether from English history, Roman history, Italian novella, or English fabliau, is revealed as participating by analogy in an action which, from the poet's point of view, is Christian, divine, and eternal', argues that Hermione is a type of Christ, Leontes, the Jew, Mamillius, the Jewish Church, and Perdita, the True Church. Bryant admits that absolute correspondence is not possible, but suggests that finding such complete correspondence is not really 'respectable'. This is a confession, I take it, that there is a limit to the exegete's ingenuity, though the confession only serves to make Bryant's theory more 'respectable'. He concludes that 'the allegory is most assuredly there, whether he [i.e., Shakespeare] saw it or not'.[151]

William O. Scott (1963) follows Honigmann's suggestion (although he does not refer to him) in trying to examine the seasonal and floral motifs associated with the Proserpine myth from a 'pre-Frazerian viewpoint to see what Shakespeare's contemporaries would have made of a tale about winter and spring garnished out with a pastoral bouquet'. His conclusion is that Shakespeare was aware of the symbolic import of the seasonal myths and floral symbols as such ideas were fairly commonplace in the Renaissance. '<u>The Winter's Tale</u>,' he writes, 'owes its symbolic values to Shakespeare, and our discovery of them is a rediscovery.'[152]

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[150] Honigmann, 'Secondary Sources of <u>The Winter's Tale</u>', pp. 33-6.

[151] Bryant, 'Shakespeare's Allegory : <u>The Winter's Tale</u>', pp. 211-14, 219.

[152] 'Seasons and Flowers in <u>The Winter's Tale</u>', pp. 411, 417.

Katharine Briggs (1954) mentions a production of the play by Constance Armfield in which it is treated as 'solar myth', but while admitting the plausibility of this interpretation, she doubts whether such an idea would have occurred to Shakespeare.[153]

Finally, William Barry Thorne (1968) recapitulates most of the themes we have discussed so far in connexion with this play. 'The Winter's Tale,' he writes, paraphrasing G. Wilson Knight, 'explores concepts of immortality and fertility in what might be deemed a season-myth.' It was rather late in the day, I should have thought, to arrive at that conclusion.[154]

The Tempest

Studies of the play's sources in the last century managed to trace analogues of the story in various myths and folk tales. I have found a comparison (1884) of the plot to an episode in the story of Rama in the Sanskrit epic Ramayana. Hermann Grimm (1875) compares the episode in which Ferdinand is assigned tasks by Prospero to Greek and Indian stories. But the earliest 'myth criticism' of the play could well be Victor Hugo's (1865) interpretation of the play in terms of the Christian myth of Cain and Abel, the denouement being, according to him, a presentation of Paradise Regained.[155]

Wigston's comments on the play follow the familiar path. Miranda is the daughter of Ceres and Jupiter, who is Prospero; hence she is Proserpine. More importantly, Wigston relates the play to the VIth Book of the Aeneid, especially with respect to the doctrine of idealism, which, he points out, was taught in the Eleusinian mysteries.

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[153] Briggs, 'The Folds of Folklore', p. 172.

[154] "Things Reborn" : A Study of the Rebirth Motif in The Winter's Tale', p. 34.

[155] Notes and Queries, 3rd Series, VI (10 September 1864), 202; Hermann Grimm, Fünfzehn Essays (1875), quoted in the New Variorum edition of the play (1892), pp. 346-8; Victor Hugo, quoted ibid., pp. 357-8.

Wigston also relates the references to Dido with the idea of rebirth by arguing that Tunis = Carthage = Libya = the land of the Phoenix. (Cp. also 'She came from Libya', The Winter's Tale, V.1.156, which refers to Perdita.) Furthermore, Wigston suggests that the word 'release' in the epilogue means interpretation (Wigston associates this with rebirth, since the true interpretation of the play is, in a way, bringing its significance into existence after a period during which this significance was lying dead or dormant: interpretation becomes an act like the raising the spirits of the dead, a miniature creation). This idea is echoed by Colin Still in his influential interpretation of the play, as indeed are many other of Wigston's ideas.[156]

I shall briefly mention two studies before going on to discuss Still's book. W. W. Newell (1903) traces folk and mythical as well as literary analogues of the tasks in the Ferdinand episode, referring to the folk tale of the 'bird wife' as well as to stories from The Arabian Nights, the Argonautic myth, Cupid and Psyche, and some stories from Hindu and Buddhist mythology. Sivori Levey (1921) interprets the play as a nature myth, suggesting that Prospero represents the influence of the sun, ensuring prosperity, Sycorax, the evil influence of the moon, Juno, the moon of good influence, Ariel, the benevolent south wind, and Caliban, the baleful south-west wind.[157]

Colin Still's book Shakespeare's Mystery Play appeared first in 1921. An expanded version with a theoretical discussion added was published in 1936 as The Timeless Theme and it is to this book that I shall refer. The differences between the two books are not significant. Still's basic idea is that The Tempest presents the Theme of the Mystery of Redemption which, he says, is the one timeless theme that all great art is, insofar as it approaches the status of myth, concerned to reflect.

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[156] Cp. Wigston, New Study, p. 326; Bacon, Shakespeare, and the Rosicrucians, pp. 62-9, 156; Colin Still, The Timeless Theme, pp. 240-1.

[157] Newell, 'Sources of Shakespeare's Tempest', esp. pp. 245-8; Levey, The Source of 'The Tempest', p. 1.

This should hardly strike us as a novel idea at this stage of our documentation. Still's detailed comparisons between the play and Eleusinian mysteries should also not come as a novelty after Wigston, although it must be granted that Still is able to put forward his case with far more discipline. Still also makes the novel suggestion that the play presents two kinds of initiation: the members of Alonso's party undergoing the lesser initiation and Ferdinand, the higher. In relating this interpretation to the system of archetypal 'Universal Imagery' of the four elements and the three intermediary compounds, each with its corresponding 'plane of Consciousness' and its 'mythical region', Colin Still does carry the interpretation of the play beyond Wigston's. But the idea of the correspondence between the elements and states of mind (microcosm) and mythical regions (heaven, hell, etc., i.e., the macrocosm) is, of course, very ancient.[158]

Theodor Reik (1942) associates Ariel's song (Full Fathom Five) with some creation myths in which the universe is described in terms of a human or animal body.[159]

Richard Rosenheim (1952) also interprets the play as an initiation myth, pointing out the following features of the mysteries in the play: test of memory (Miranda's, I.2); 'the pious outlook for a Golden Age to come'; and the Rebirth of the Beloved Disciples, Fernando (sic) and Miranda. Ferdinand is described as the New Adam who undergoes the Test of Water and the Test of Fire. Shakespeare surveys, in brief, 'the entire previous occult history of man on earth, from the destruction of the fire-world of Old Lemuria to the rebirth of the sunken continent as air-and-waterborne Atlantis'.[160]

Bernard Baum (1953) interprets the play in terms of the 'mythos'

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[158] Still, pp. 19ff., 70, 124, passim.

[159] Reik, Thirty Years with Freud, p. 187.

[160] Rosenheim, 'The Mystic Message of The Tempest', in The Eternal Drama, pp. 120-32, esp. pp. 124-5.

(=fundamental and perhaps unconsciously held beliefs) of the unity of man and nature within a hierarchic order, and he contrasts this with a different and more dynamic mythos that he discovers in Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape.[161] Mythos or myth in this usage is a synonym for 'world-view' or 'world-picture'.

Finally, Don Cameron Allen (1960) suggests connexions between the play and heroic literature (coming to magic island across broad waters in helpless boat', e.g., the Argonauts, Ceyx, Aeneas to Carthage, voyage of Odysseus). He also points out the allegorical interpretation of this motif in Christian and non-Christian exegesis going back to the time of Heraclitus. Cameron is thus attempting to interpret the play in the light of the allegorical tradition of myth-hermeneutic, a tradition which, as he demonstrates, was still very active during the Renaissance.[162]

The Poems

The rebirth motif is very obvious in 'The Phoenix and the Turtle'. Venus and Adonis is related to solar mythology by Christopher Butler and Alastair Fowler, who illustrate from Renaissance material the common solar interpretation of the myth in Renaissance mythography. They quote George Sandys' comment that 'Adonis was no other than the Sun, adored under that name by the Phoenicians; as Venus by the name of Astarten', and suggest that the poem is also based upon a similar reading of the myth.[163]

The Sonnets

Wigston relates the dark lady of the sonnets to Diana of Ephesus, Isis, and the Indian goddess Bhavani. He also suggests that the sonnets

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[161] 'Tempest and Hairy Ape: The Literary Incarnation of Mythos'.

[162] Image and Meaning, Ch. 3.

[163] 'Time Beguiling Sport : Number Symbolism in Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis', p. 125.

represent the 'antinomy of love and hate, and masculine and feminine principles, as Androgynus unity'. There is a similar idea in G. Wilson Knight's theory of Shakespeare's (and other great artists') 'bisexuality'. Leslie Fiedler has also referred to 'the myth of the Beardless Beloved', though with reference not merely to the young man in the sonnets but also to the frequent appearance of the heroines in male attire. Northrop Frye has also studied the sonnets in terms of the myths of Eros and the 'white goddess' in her destructive aspect.[164]

The concept of myth whose application in Shakespeare-criticism we have been examining so far is less influential in theory than in practice. It has been pointed out, rightly I believe, that the idea of myth is far more important than the application of specific myths to works of art, (myth here being understood generally as a mode of thought antithetical to the scientific, rational, and historical; a mode of thought, moreover, which reflects a way of life in far greater harmony with nature and with other men than is possible in a secular or individualistic and materialistic culture). But my research has led me to the conclusion that this is true only as far as theory is concerned; there are indeed numerous essays and books on the idea of myth, far more than there are applications of the idea to works of art. But where actual applications are concerned, it is not so much the concept of myth as a special mode of thought that has been most operative, though implicitly it may be present behind some studies, but rather the concept of myth as a story embodying certain timeless, universal, and even sacred truths, usually in the form of an allegory which helps to protect this truth from profanation. This concept, I have argued, owes little to the theories of anthropologists

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[164] Wigston, pp. 10, 109-10; Knight, The Mutual Flame, esp. pp. 30 ff.; Fiedler, 'Shakespeare and the Paradox of Illusion', p. 48; Frye, 'How True a Twain', in Fables of Identity, esp. pp. 92, 105.

from Frazer onwards, but is rather to be seen in the tradition of myth and biblical hermeneutics, especially the tradition of allegorical and typological exegesis. Myth criticism (at least the larger part of it) seems to me to be an extension of this mode of interpretation to non-scriptural or non-mythical material, usually with the intention of conferring a mythical or religious status on the object.

Not all the examples of myth criticism that I have documented in this chapter are, of course, to be comprehended within the above generalization. There are many essays which merely seek to relate the work of art to particular myths, folk tales or fairy tales, or even to other works of art which have acquired, as it were, a mythical status, without any framework of theory within which these comparisons could be significant. But cumulatively, as I have suggested, even such drawing of parallels serves to bring out those elements in Shakespeare that are not unique to him but which he shares with a large variety of works. It is on the basis of the extensive comparisons that have been drawn, largely in the process of tracing the sources of Shakespeare's plots, that Northrop Frye is able to present to us a 'primitive', 'popular' and 'conventional' Shakespeare to replace the sophisticated psychologist of Bradley and the even more sophisticated moralist-cum-pattern-maker of the Scrutiny critics and the New Critics. Very often, of course, such replacement is achieved only after considerable distortions, the exaggerating of those elements in the works which may be only incidental or irrelevant. I have mentioned one example of this in the criticism of Macbeth. Jekels argues that it is really Macduff who should be the hero of the play, as indeed he should if the play is to correspond to the pattern of the hero myth. But he obviously is not the hero, and the difference between Shakespeare's play and the myth becomes as important as the similarities. If anything, Shakespeare's is a very subversive rendering of the myth, whereby the 'hero' is relegated to the second place at best, the focus of interest being his adversary.

More often, myth criticism involves not merely comparisons

with particular myths, but the reduction of a number of myths, folk tales, rituals, and literary works, to a common archetypal pattern. This archetypal pattern is then allegorically interpreted. Some of the common and interrelated themes that this allegorical interpretation discovers in the work are the themes of rebirth (both physical and psychic), the loss and regaining of paradise, the progress from unity through diversity to a higher unity, and the conflict of summer and winter, or of similar binary opposites like life and death, light and darkness, tempests and music, and so on. The theme of rebirth is the most inclusive of all these themes and has been the one most frequently discovered. I have tried to show that although the idea of rebirth has been popularized through the writings of Frazer, and perhaps even more, through T. S. Eliot's use of it in The Waste Land, it is actually of more ancient origin, and I have tried to show the incidence of this idea in esoteric rituals of initiation, especially the rituals of the Eleusinian mysteries. I have also tried to show that these ideas were applied to Shakespeare even before Frazer. It is because this idea is so central to myth criticism that I have been able to include within the category of such criticism some studies of the plays in the light of esoteric doctrine which share this idea but which do not present themselves explicitly as 'myth criticism'. Taking these studies of the plays also into consideration, then, it turns out that practically all the plays of Shakespeare can be seen as representing some one or the other of the themes mentioned. At the same time one is left with the impression that many of the interpretations are obviously forced and that the themes (of rebirth, loss of paradise, reconciliation, etc.) are found in the plays because the critic is determined to find them there. On the whole, then, such criticism is more interesting for the light it might throw on these undoubtedly widely prevalent themes than for the light it throws on the plays themselves. Bearing in mind the fact that the kind of myth criticism I have documented is quantitatively the most important of all applications of the concepts of myth and ritual to the plays of Shakespeare, our conclusion about the value of such criticism cannot but be largely negative.

There is however another aspect of myth criticism which is important and which cannot be explained merely in terms of comparative-cum-allegorical criticism. For while comparison is the main methodological tool employed by such criticism, it is important to bear in mind that the comparison is of a certain kind. The fact that it is myths with which the work of art is compared assumes great importance from this point of view. Myths are conceived of not only as embodiments of archetypal themes, but also as the earliest embodiments of these. It has been argued that the term 'archetype' should be understood not in a temporal sense but rather as referring to the arche, the first principle. This is undoubtedly true as far as the content of myth criticism is concerned, namely the themes that are discerned beneath the surface plot of the literary work. These themes could be described equally appropriately by some such word as 'universal' or 'fundamental' rather than 'archetypal', 'primitive', 'primordial', or 'primal'. W. K. Wimsatt points this out in a criticism of Frye in which he accuses him of using these latter mystically charged words rather than the simpler, more neutral words in order to gain a sense of profundity for his ideas which is not there. Frye however denies the charge.[165]

But I think that the aura of mystery evoked by some myth criticism is important and that it is this which gives successful myth criticism its distinctive quality. And it is in evoking this sense of mystery that the primitive aspect of myth (or folk tale, fairy tale, or ritual) plays an important role. It is a fact empirically observed that what Freud terms 'the return to origins' arouses far greater emotional response than a relating to universal archetypes conceived 'essentially' rather than 'temporally'. Modern anthropology has also clearly brought out the fact that what Mircea Eliade has terms the 'valorization' of existence is also achieved through this return to origins (in illo tempore,

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[165] Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism, edited by Murray Krieger, pp. 98, 141.

ab origine).[166] Objects and events are given value, mana, mystery, sanctity, resonance, or what you will, by being related to the time of beginnings. Similarly, I would like to suggest, literary objects are also given value or mana by being returned, as it were, to their origins.

I would not like to suggest that all the mana-like quality of a work of art is there because it has been conferred upon it by the critic-priest. Obviously, some works of art do have this quality to begin with and the myth critic merely tries to explain this by making explicit what was implicitly there. It is, in fact, to explain this quality (Jung's term is 'numinous') that the theory of archetypes has been advanced. A work has a numinous quality when it reflects an archetype. This sets bells ringing within a reader's memory, memory, however, not of individual experience but of racial experiences stored in the storehouse of racial memory or the collective unconscious. Jung's own discussion of the archetypes of the collective unconscious ranges from unverifiable mysticism to apparently sensible but still unverifiable arguments to the effect that what the collective unconscious stores is not actual experiences, stories, symbols, and so forth, but the forms of these experiences. If that is so, it could be possible to discuss the archetypes with much greater scientific rigour as logical-formal principles perhaps ultimately built-in in the structure of the brain. This is not however the kind of enquiry which the myth critic is likely to find congenial.

The important point about the theory of archetypes is that, in spite of the 'essentialist' appearance of the term archetype, in practice it has a temporal connotation and represents, as does the term 'myth', an attempt to return to origins. It is the temporal origin in 'primordial' times, far beyond the history of the individual, that gives to the Jungian archetype its numinosity. The archetypal work resonates, as it were, with the history of the whole race; the individual

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[166] Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp. ix, 4.

consciousness is engulfed by images from the collective unconscious, and it is this which gives to such works their enduring appeal, an appeal which, Jung admits, may be independent of the merit of the work in question. By the mediation of the work the reader is assimilated, as it were, into a collective matrix.

Norman Holland puts forward a Freudian explanation of the 'resonance' of a mythical work. He associates it with religious experience of a certain kind. Professor Holland writes:

> Myth-in-literature, then, "proves" the existence of the kind of religious emotion proclaimed by Tillich and other neo-orthodox theologians. In this sense, myth criticism becomes just one more phase in Arnold's strategy of claiming for religion a poetic validity or for literature a religious sanction. Myth criticism thus paves a way for the rather vague theism so much in vogue now -- on the basis of our subjective experience of resonance.

Professor Holland goes on to relate this feeling of resonance to what Freud called the 'oceanic feeling', the feeling, that is, of belonging to a larger matrix, which, according to Freud, is the basis of religious experience. A work has these resonances, Holland argues, when it has a myth submerged in it, and when the reader is aware that the myth is there, but has no certain knowledge of it. The 'mere awareness of myth' is enough to evoke these resonances. This awareness gives the oceanic feeling because it gives one the feeling of being submerged in a larger entity, the one timeless theme, we might say, of which the various works can be seen as so many manifestations. This merging into a larger entity is related by Holland to the 'primal matrix' from which the infant emerges with the development of the individual ego. Mythic works, therefore, he suggests, or rather those works in which the presence of the myth evokes the feeling of resonance, usually have a predominance of oral elements, reminiscent of the infant's Edenic maternal matrix

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[167] See esp. Man and his Symbols, p. 99.

during the oral stage of his development.[168]

I am not competent to judge the merits of the more technical aspects of this analysis of the feeling of renonance; the idea that in such cases there is a predominance of oral elements may be capable of being statistically tested. But I believe that Holland's emphasis on conscious awareness of the myth (though not certain knowledge of it) as essential for mythic resonance is quite right. It will be generally granted that one of the commonest feelings when confronted with a mythic or archetypal work is that of the déjà vu, a feeling that what one is reading now one has read or heard before. The work seems to gain in mystery and power if the feeling remains without conscious awareness of where one had read the work, or something like it, before. It will also generally be found that when one traces the sources of this feeling one comes across stories which one had read in childhood. It is dimly perceived parallels with the experiences and readings of childhood that seem to give the work its mythical, mana-like quality. And myth is merely a phylogenetic extension, as it were, of the stories that one reads as a child; it is supposed to belong to the childhood of the race rather than to the childhood of the individual alone, but it carries the same power and mystery, the power that belongs to the realm of origins.

The mana in a mythical work is thus a function of its capacity to bring up recollections of childhood. I would like to suggest a far more obvious explanation of the resonance in a work without, however, challenging the deeper explanation advanced by Norman Holland. The resonance is of individual memories of past experiences, especially literary experiences, going back to childhood that are activated by the particular work. And memories of childhood, like memories of primal

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[168] Norman Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response. See the chapter on 'Myth', esp. pp. 246-50. For an explanation of 'resonance' in terms of certain concepts in Indian aesthetics, see Maitra, Psychological Realism and Archetypes, pp. 27-8. Maitra tries to synthesize Jungian theory with the concept of dhvani.

origins, have the power to arouse great and profound emotions, even 'intimations of immortality'. The presence of a myth in a work thus gives it a resonance, a mystery, a freshness that every object or event in childhood is supposed to have.

Norman Holland has argued that in order for a work to have mythical resonance the reader must be aware of the myth, and I have indicated my agreement with this view. However, a qualification has to be made. Half conscious awareness of a myth would give the feeling of déjà vu which plays such an important role in our response to a mythical work of art. But déjà vu is a tricky feeling. It is an aspect of the 'uncanny', which Freud relates to the sudden emergence of repressed desires under the impact of something which resembles those desires.[169] W. J. Dunne in An Experiment with Time (1927) suggested a very different explanation, namely, that the feeling arises because one has seen something similar before, in dreams. The final solution to the problem may lie in the field of neurology and cybernetics. Perhaps it is just a matter of accidental connexions within the circuit of the brain. Whatever the causes, one thing seems to be certain. The feeling, partly because it is so vague, can be induced as well as spontaneously aroused.

And this brings me to the point I want to make about myth criticism. When it is at its best, as in the case of Freud and some other psychoanalysts, Gilbert Murray, Maud Bodkin -- a very short list, I am afraid -- its function seems to me to be to induce this feeling of déjà vu. Freud of course does it marvellously. This can be done with even those works of art which do not in the unaided reader set bells ringing. Once the parallels with myths and fairy tales have been suggested, however, and if it is done successfully, one is struck by the rightness of it. The feeling then is one of re-cognition rather than new cognition. At its best, I suggest, myth criticism of the kind that we have been

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[169] Freud, 'The "Uncanny" ', esp. p. 241.

discussing in this chapter makes us see a work of art as if we were recognizing it rather than reading it for the first time, and not recognizing in it just any thing, but rather seeing in it the image of one's childhood or the childhood of the race. Perhaps the concern for origins is ultimately a concern for lost childhood.

It is in this aspect of inducing recognition rather than cognition that myth criticism differs from ordinary allegorical interpretations. For without the comparison with myths and fairy tales this element of recognition would not be there. Freud could have interpreted the theme of the three caskets simply as an allegorical presentation of a man's need to come to terms with death, but without his evocative parallels this 'truth' would not have the same power to convince.

In this respect, it would seem, myth criticism corresponds to ritual in the realm of religion. For the purpose of ritual is to sanctify, with reference to the time of origins, the object of worship or veneration. Myth criticism similarly sanctifies, with reference to racial and individual origins, the individual work and the doctrine that this work or the myth critic himself seeks to project. Myth criticism, in other words, is itself an example of the mythical way of thinking.

A certain kind of allegorical criticism also serves to sanctify the work of art, to give it, as it were, a mythical or scriptural status. Some Christian interpretations of Shakespeare appear to me to be examples of such 'mythologizing'. In other words, by interpreting Shakespeare allegorically these critics are able to assimilate him to scriptural doctrine and to the Christian myth. Allegory has always been a convenient way of reconciling different mythologies or philosophies. Such criticism is allegorizing criticism because the work that they discuss is not obviously allegorical. If it were it would set a severe restriction on the critic's ingenuity. The typological exegesis of Shakespeare may be seen as such allegorizing-cum-mythologizing. It is true, as Battenhouse, Bryant, and others have pointed out, that typological exegesis was fairly common during the Renaissance. It was

even orthodox Christian practice to consider some pagan deities and heroes as prefiguring of the Christian myth. But I am not at all sure that the change from prefiguring to just figuring (which has to be effected if Shakespeare's characters are to be interpreted typologically) is orthodox. It makes all the difference whether a character is believed to have lived before Christ or after. I do not know what theologians will have to say about considering secular figures from imaginative fiction as figural representations of Christian myth. But some such idea is precisely what some Christian criticism of the plays implies. It throws less light, I suggest, on Christian doctrine in Shakespeare than on the piety of these critics, who attempt to reconcile Shakespeare to the Bible, or rather, more accurately, to give Shakespeare an almost scriptural status.

This brings me to my final point. Many of the allegorical interpretations of the plays that we have seen, including the Christian ones, make sense only if Shakespeare is granted mythical status, for they seem to imply not merely that there are unconscious allegorical elements in the play, but that the plays contain hidden wisdom in the same manner that the scriptures do. The growth of bardolatry is, of course, a well-documented subject, and there is little point in rehearsing it here.[170] I would like to supplement the account from my own angle. Some of the earliest uses of myth in the nineteenth century (apart from the use of 'mythology' in combinations like the 'fairy mythology of Shakespeare') with reference to Shakespeare are to be found, surprisingly enough, in Baconian books and pamphlets. There, myth, in terms like 'the myth of Shakespeare' or 'The Shakespeare myth', is used to signify a false or erroneous idea rather than anything very profound and sacred.[171]

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[170] For an interesting discussion of the mythical or religious role given to Shakespeare, see R. B. Heilman, 'The Role We Give Shakespeare'; see also, Earl W. Wasserman, 'Shakespeare and the English Romantic Movement'; and Alfred Harbage, 'The Myth of Perfection' in Conceptions of Shakespeare.

[171] I find, for example, the following titles in the catalogue of the Shakespeare Memorial Library, Birmingham. Most of the books are listed under the 'Bacon-Shakespeare Controversy', though not all

But it is usually to be found that where one myth is sought to be destroyed another one is seeking to assume its place. And the whole controversy about Bacon or the Earl of Oxford followed a very mythical pattern. Apart from the fact that many Baconians, including Wigston, were very interested in esoteric myths and rituals, there is also the point that this whole insistence on the mysterious origins of the writer of the plays follows the well known pattern of the lives of mythical heroes of mysterious birth. 'Shakespeare' obviously became such a culture-hero for these Baconians. Whether the explanation given by Freud and Otto Rank for this feature of the hero myths applies to these critics, as Alfred Harbage[172] suggests it does, is another matter. The important point for our purpose is to note the mythical status of the writer of the plays. Ultimately perhaps, one might say, myth criticism also helps to perpetuate the 'myth of Shakespeare', especially that kind of it which seeks to interpret the plays allegorically in the light of a pre-conceived doctrine, whether this be the doctrine of rebirth, or of paradise lost and regained, or of the perpetual conflict between summer and winter.

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of them are by Baconians: C. C. Cattell, Shakespeare : Was he a Myth? Or, What did he Write? (1880); J. A. Morgan, The Shakespearean Myth (1881); Ignatius Donnelly, 'The Shakespeare Myth' (1887); J. Watts de Peyster, Was the Shakespeare, after all, a myth? (1888); Sir E. Durning-Lawrence, 'The Shakespeare Myth' (1912); Mary Rose, Baconian Myths (1913); Sydenham of Comte and H. C. Batchelor, 'The "Shakespeare" Myth : A Challenge' (1924); H. W. Wack, ' "Shakespeare": Man -- Mask -- Myth?' (1930). While on the subject of bardolatry, we might mention the books by 'Clelia' (pseudonym of Charles Downing): The Shakespearean Reconciliation (1888); God in Shakespeare (1889); and The Messiahship of Shakespeare (1901). For Clelia, Shakespeare was none other than the Messiah himself.

[172] Harbage, 'Shakespeare as Culture Hero'.

CHAPTER 7

RITUAL IN SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

In this chapter I propose to survey the criticism of Shakespeare which applies the concept of ritual to the plays. Often, of course, the idea of ritual is associated with that of myth, as in the tracing of the 'myth and ritual pattern' in the individual work. This kind of criticism was surveyed in the previous chapter. Here I shall restrict myself to those studies which attempt either to relate the plays to specific rituals (primitive or Elizabethan), or to study the ritual elements as ritual. Even in this latter kind of ritual criticism, anthropological ideas play a role. This is so because ritual, even when taken in a very loose sense to imply any kind of formal or ceremonial action, religious or secular, is often associated with the primitive mode of thought, since belief in the efficacy of such actions is supposed to be primitive. It will be seen that the most frequent kind of criticism is the drawing of parallels between the plays and specific rituals. A promising line of inquiry would be to study these rituals, if they are present in the plays at all, as they are mediated through Elizabethan folk customs and rituals. But apart from C. L. Barber's book on Shakespeare's comedies, there has been little development in this approach since the early years of this century, when Janet Spens tried to relate Shakespeare's dramas to Elizabethan folk festivals and customs. The few such studies that are there seem to me to be more convincing with the comedies than the tragedies.

The Comedies

The Comedy of Errors

I have not come across any discussion of this play in terms of ritual, but its relation to rituals of initiation is briefly hinted at in Frye's comments on the play referred to in the previous chapter.

The Taming of the Shrew

William Barry Thorne (1968) discusses the presence of elements of 'the folk-drama, the ritual, and the pastime of the sixteenth century'. He argues that the Induction prepares for the 'misrule' action of the main plot because Sly is, in a way, a King of Misrule in a saturnalian pattern of festivity, in which the real king is replaced by a mock king and the social order turned topsy turvy. This is reflected in the main plot in the exchanging of roles between Tranio and Lucentio, in the fantastic marriage dress of Petruchio, in the theme of disguise, and in the scene of 'mad mistaking', in which, for Katharina, night becomes day and day night, 'just as it is supposed to happen during periods of misrule'. Thorne also indicates parallels between episodes in the play and traditional folk drama and ritual, such as the Maying festival and the mummers' wooing play. Petruchio's boasting, for example, is related to that of the fool in the wooing play, and the expression of rivalry between the suitors (Gremio and Tranio), to the contest between the old and the young suitors in the same play. The struggle between the old and the young is, according to Thorne, not only the theme of the mummers' plays and of 'the primitive ritual underlying the May flight to the woods and all the many forms of Saturnalia or misrule', but also of nearly all the comedies of Shakespeare. Young men defeat the anti-comic elements, the harsh laws imposed by the old men, and restore the fertility and well-being of the community. Thorne writes:

> In the comedies, the women are often fertility symbols representing the well-being of the community as a whole. In this case, the finding of a husband for Katharina, and the freeing of Bianca from her captivity, will resolve an

> unhealthy situation in the family and also, symbolically, in the community itself.

I do not feel that Thorne has adequately demonstrated the presence of this general theme in the play (and the theme of fertility could be discovered in any play ending with a marriage) but he has demonstrated some parallels with the mummers' plays, and his thesis that The Taming of the Shrew illustrates 'how deeply rooted in folk tradition were Shakespeare's earlier comedies' is, I believe, sound.[1]

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Janet Spens, who was a disciple of Gilbert Murray and A. C. Bradley, argued in her book, An Essay on Shakespeare's Relation to Tradition (1916), that beginning with The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Shakespeare 'used a folk-play habitually as the nucleus of his comedies'. For example, in the folk-plays of Robin Hood there is a 'suggestion of the free life of the forest', which is taken over in the later comedies. It is this free life, in which 'all the restraints of conventional life are necessarily broken and human passions take their natural course', that gives reality and a depth of meaning' to The Two Gentlemen. Miss Spens goes on to relate these and other folk plays and rituals to the primitive rituals of renouveau studied by Frazer and others.[2] Her observations on the free life of the forest are very similar to C. L. Barber's idea of comic release through festivity. Northrop Frye's comments on this play and the other comedies in his famous essay, 'The Argument of Comedy' (1948), also seem to owe a good deal to Miss Spens's work. His 'green world' is merely a synonym for her 'free life of the forest'.[3]

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[1] Thorne, 'Folk Elements in The Taming of the Shrew', pp. 483-4, 489-90, 495.

[2] Janet Spens, An Essay on Shakespeare's Relation to Tradition, pp. 33-8, 49.

[3] Cf., Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, esp. pp. 6-10; Frye, 'The Argument of Comedy', pp. 85-6.

Love's Labour's Lost

C. L. Barber (1959) argues that this play, like A Midsummer-Night's Dream, is made up on 'the model of games and pastimes'. The play begins, according to Barber, with 'the folly of resistance' (i.e., the men's vow not to see any woman), which soon gives way to the 'folly of release'. However, the festive release presented in the play is not the release of love, but rather of witty expressions of love. Barber writes:

> For the festivity releases, not the delights of love, but the delights of expression which the prospect of love engenders -- though those involved are not clear about the distinction until it is forced on them; the clarification achieved by release is this recognition that love is not wooing games or love talk. And yet these sports are not written off or ruled out; on the contrary the play offers their delights for our enjoyment, while humorously putting them in their place.

It is clear from the above that Barber is not concerned with parallels between the play and festive rituals in matters of specific details, but rather with the overall pattern of both. The form of the rituals, he writes, 'is relevant to the form of the plays as a parallel expression of the same kind of organization of experience'. In both ritual and play the movement of feeling is from 'release' to 'clarification', though the clarification is brought about by different means in ritual and in comedy. The clarification in this play is that the festivity is finally understood to have been merely a release of witty masquerade rather than love. That is why there is no marriage at the end of the play. But the songs of spring and winter with which the play concludes evoke the daily life of the community from which the special festive occasions are shaped. They thus provide for the conclusion of the play what is usually suggested through marriage, namely, 'an expression of the going-on power of life'.[4]

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[4]Barber, pp. 88-9, 93, 118, 194 (note).

A Midsummer-Night's Dream

This play has been very popular with folklorists, who have been concerned to point out elements of Elizabethan folk beliefs and customs in it. The obvious analogy to draw would be between the play and the May Day festival. But before going on to discuss that I would just like to mention a different analogy. In a lecture entitled 'Custom and Myth in A Midsummer-Night's Dream' and delivered in 1897, Henry Wood suggests that the 'play turns on the Germanic custom of trinoctium, of waiting before consummation of marriage'.[5]

Janet Spens (1916) suggests the parallel between the play and the May Day festival. She also relates it to the ancient Greek custom of ritual matings at night in forests.[6] Peter F. Fisher (1957) argues that the play presents a problem, namely, the irrational force of sublunary passion in conflict with the rationally ordered world of the Athenian court in the heroic age of Theseus', and its resolution. This resolution is achieved by placing the action of the play within the larger context of nature. The May Day or Midsummer festivity corresponds to the Saturnalia of the winter solstice and symbolizes the release of passion. As Fisher puts it, 'the depths of natural impulse are given rein, and an invasion of the elemental world of passion is undertaken'. The similarity of this to Miss Spens's idea of the release provided by the 'free life of the forest' is obvious, though it must be pointed out that Fisher considers this world of the 'elemental power of nature' as but one of the three 'spheres of influence' working on the lovers, the other two being 'the classical heritage of reason' and the 'workaday world of common and uncommon sense'.[7]

C. L. Barber argues that the folly released in this play is the

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[5]Cited by John W. Velz, Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition, p. 162.

[6]Spens, pp. 43-4.

[7]The Argument of A Midsummer-Night's Dream', esp. pp. 307-8.

folly of 'delusive fantasy'. Once again, as in Love's Labour's Lost, this release is effected, as if through saturnalian festivity, and it leads in this play to clarification about the role of imagination in life.[8]

James E. Robinson (1968) argues that the play fuses 'comedy as ritual' and 'comedy as argument or rhetoric'. The ritual aspect of the comedy consists in the magical elements, the fairies, the moonlit wood, and so on. It is an expression of the desire to be at one with nature; the rhetorical aspect, on the other hand, expresses the desire to be at one with law, and in the play these two desires, initially in conflict with each other, are finally reconciled in marriage. The justification for calling one of the structures the 'ritual' structure lies, I think, in the fact that rituals are also concerned with affirming man's unity with nature within a sacramental universe. Within the ritual structure, according to Mr. Robinson,

> the process of young love unfolds as a series of symbolic acts performed by the fairies, potions of Cupid and Diana serving as sacramental media for the action. As the fairies intervene, the dialectical [= rhetorical] pattern is modulated by magic and symbol. Thus in combining the two levels of action Shakespeare creates a prism through which a peculiar refraction of the relation of ordinary and symbolic reality, of experience and dream, can emerge.[9]

The three critics that we have just discussed all come to the conclusion that the play manages a very unique and successful synthesis or balance between divergent and opposing elements and attitudes: passion and reason (Fisher), festivity and ordinary life (Barber), and ritual and rhetoric, nature and law (Robinson). They all agree, moreover, that the ritual or festive element, however conspicuous, is not to be taken by itself, but to be seen in the larger perspective within which Shakespeare places it.

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[8] Barber, pp. 119-162, 248.

[9] 'The Ritual and Rhetoric of A Midsummer-Night's Dream', esp. p. 385.

The Merchant of Venice

Janet Spens suggests that Antonio is the scapegoat. C. L. Barber has criticized this. He argues that it is Shylock who presents analogies with the scapegoat. According to him, this play as a whole 'is not shaped by festivity in the relatively direct way' that he traced in Love's Labour's Lost and A Midsummer-Night's Dream. He argues, nevertheless, that there are 'analogies to social occasions and rituals' which can be useful in understanding the symbolic action of the play. One such analogy that Barber points out is between the role of Shylock and that of the scapegoat in primitive rituals. The scapegoat is defined as 'a figure in whom the evils potential in a social organization are embodied, recognized and enjoyed during a period of licence, and then in due course abused, ridiculed, and expelled'. A little earlier, Barber equates Shylock with the kill-joy figures who, along with butts and intruders, provide the complementary and antagonistic roles to those of the revellers, wits, and insiders, respectively, within the festive framework of the action of the play.[10] However, it is difficult to see how the roles of the kill-joy and the scapegoat can be easily reconciled, as seems to be necessary for Barber's argument: Shylock cannot be both a Puritan and a Carnival-King, a Malvolio and a Falstaff. This difficulty, along with the controversy regarding the very identity of the scapegoat figure in the play, points, I believe, to a radical vagueness in the use of the concept of the scapegoat.

Paula Brody, in the article already referred to in the course of discussion of this play in the previous chapter, relates the role of Shylock not only to that of the scapegoat figure, but also to the totemic ritual of omophagia. She writes: 'Shylock wants omophagia; instead he becomes the scapegoat in the ritual of renewal, the object which is both sacrificed and also deified.' The ritual of omophagia, according to Miss Brody, explains Shylock's desire for the pound of flesh in a way that

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[10] Spens, p. 45; Barber, pp. 166-8, 194 (note).

his own rationalizations of this desire ('say it is my humour', 'a certain loathing I bear Antonio', and so on) do not. In the omophagia, according to Miss Brody, he who eats the flesh assimilates the qualities of the victim. Moreover, it is 'a form of communion with the spirit of the group'; by partaking of the flesh of the victim one becomes a socially accepted member of the group. In wanting to take a pound of Antonio's flesh, therefore, Shylock wishes to be assimilated to Venetian society. The absurdity of this view is readily apparent. There is little evidence in the play to warrant the equation of wanting a pound of flesh with wanting to eat it. But even if one were to allow this equation, the parallel with totemic cannibalism would still be rather remote because the essence of such ritual is the communal sharing of the victim's flesh; a man is assimilated to the totemic group, I imagine, because he has assimilated the same flesh and blood as the other members of the group. It is in this sense that he is one with them in flesh and blood. But Shylock explicitly refuses communal sharing of any meal with the Christians. He seems to be quite happy with his isolation; it is precisely the assimilation into the Christian group that he fears.

Miss Brody takes up Barber's observation about Shylock's scapegoat function and elaborates upon it a bit further, and with further absurdity. The temporary deification of the scapegoat, which, she suggests, is essential to the scapegoat ritual, is parallelled in the play, in her view, by the fact that Shylock has been admitted to Venetian society to the extent of being allowed to lend money and 'to enjoy participation in its feasting, and equality within the ritual of law'. But at the 'peak of his triumph' his fortune changes. However, before he is finally expelled, he must be made, 'at least temporarily, a full member of the tribe. . . . Thus, the baptism of Shylock'. Once he has been baptized, Miss Brody suggests, the ritual sacrifice may be completed. By being forced to forfeit half his fortune he is, in ritual terms, destroyed.[11] The fact that Shylock is not actually baptized in the play and that, in any case, it is supposed

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[11] 'Shylock's Omophagia', esp. pp. 229, 232.

to follow rather than precede the confiscation of his property (which is supposed to symbolize his ritual death) is completely ignored. Once again we see an uneasy fitting of the ritual role on the dramatic character, and a confusion about the outlines of the ritual as well as about the role of the character.

Much Ado About Nothing

I have not found any discussion of this play in terms of ritual.

As You Like It

Janet Spens sees several motifs from folk play and ritual in this play. In particular, she suggests that Shakespeare made use of the mummers' play in the figure of Jaques, whom she relates to the 'melancholy fool'. This has been questioned by R.J.E. Tiddy (1923), who points out that there is but one 'melancholy fool' in all the mummers' plays, namely, the Fool in the Revesby Plough Monday Play, who says 'I am the noble Anthony as melancholy as a mantle tree'. This, according to Tiddy, is mere nonsense, without any significance. Tiddy admits, however, that the deer-killing in As You Like It may be based on 'sights and doings which Shakespeare saw in Arden', sights which were strongly tinged with folk ritual. Finally, C. L. Barber, in his discussion of the play, emphasizes the balance that Shakespeare manages to maintain between the festive attitude and the everyday perspective. In this respect he contrasts Aristophanes with Shakespeare. The former's comedies present experience 'entirely polarized by saturnalia; there is little within the play to qualify that perspective'. The perspective was qualified, however, by the external factor that comedy had an accepted place in the festival of Dionysia. The comedy was thus only a part of the festival. But in the case of Shakespeare, 'because no such clear-cut role for saturnalia or saturnalian comedy existed within Shakespeare's culture, the play itself had to place that pole of life in relation to life as a whole'. The festival, we might say, is in this case only a part of the comedy. Barber's purpose, it is clear, is very different from that of the myth

and ritual critics. He is concerned not only with the analogies between the plays and primitive rituals, but also with the difference between the two modes of symbolic action.[12]

Twelfth Night

As early as 1867, E. Montégut pointed out the relation of this play to the Twelfth Night festivity from which it derives its title. Montégut describes the play as a 'masquerade, slightly grotesque, as befits a play whereof the title recalls one of those festivals which were most dear to the jocund humour of our forbears'. Montégut also refers to the crowning of a mock-king for the festival and the general atmosphere of carnival topsy-turvidom.[13]

Janet Spens comments on the festive aspect of the comedy, suggesting that Sir Toby is a Lord of Misrule. C. L. Barber also considers the play within the framework of his concept of festive comedy. Malvolio, according to him, is the anti-comic figure who must be expelled. More recently, Melvin Seiden (1961) argues that Malvolio is the 'scapegoat sacrificed to the amoral bacchanalian gods of comedy'. Malvolio, he writes,

> is Shakespeare's comic Coriolanus, a man beset by the wolves who are his enemies and the jackals who are or ought to be his friends. In America no one loves a cop -- even when he's called a policeman. In Illyria the natives are apparently no different, and even light-hearted Illyrian comedy turns out to be a cannibalistic affair, at bottom.[14]

Once again we observe the rather loose use of the concept of the scapegoat. Any sacrifice must not be taken to be a scapegoat

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[12] Spens, pp. 45-9; Tiddy, The Mummers' Play, p. 126; Barber, pp. 222-39, esp. p. 239.

[13] Cited in the New Variorum Edition, reprinted by Dover Books (New York, 1964), pp. 382-3.

[14] Spens, pp. 41-3; Barber, p. 257; Seiden, 'Malvolio Reconsidered', pp. 113-14.

sacrifice. In any case, expulsion is not the equivalent of sacrifice, nor, for that matter, is killing. To expel a recalcitrant element from a community is a very obvious action which does not require Frazer's idea of the divine scapegoat to explain it. The sins and evils of the community are not transferred on to Malvolio, and he is in no sense divine or taboo. Even in a psychological sense the concept of the scapegoat in relation to Malvolio does not make sense. For in the scapegoat, it may be argued, we exorcise those desires and impulses within us which we would like to enjoy but dare not, and which are therefore displaced on to another person whose temporary freedom from social or moral restraints we vicariously share, but whom we finally sacrifice in order to make peace with the reality principle. Or, in a more simple way, a scapegoat might be any person or object that we can blame for our misfortunes or accidents (when we kick a stone in anger after stumbling, we are making of the stone a scapegoat). But in neither of these psychological senses either can Malvolio be said to be a scapegoat. One does not know what answer to give, therefore, when Mr. Seiden asks: 'If Malvolio is not the perfect mythic scapegoat, where in our literature does one find a figure who can be called a scapegoat?' According to Barber, in the festive action it is the comic (or festive) figure that is ultimately sacrificed. He writes that 'to put Carnival on trial, run him out of town, and burn or buy him is in folk custom a way of limiting, by ritual, the attitudes and impulses set loose by ritual'.[15] Seiden, on the other hand (and Barber as well at times) maintains that it is the anti-comic figure that is finally sacrificed. It may be possible to argue that <u>both</u> are sacrificed because they represent extreme attitudes to festivity, but little is gained by using the term scapegoat to describe them both.

<u>The Merry Wives of Windsor</u>.

The tricks played on Falstaff, especially the pinching and burning

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[15] Barber, p. 213.

when he is disguised as Herne the Hunter, have strong ritual overtones. Northrop Frye (1948) describes them as 'an elaborate ritual of the defeat of winter, known to folklorists as ' "carrying out Death," ' of which Falstaff is the victim'. Frye adds:

> Falstaff must have felt that, after being thrown into the water, dressed up as a witch and beaten out of a house with curses, and finally supplied with a beast's head and singed with candles while he said, "Divide me like a brib'd buck, each a haunch," he had done about all that could reasonably be asked of any fertility spirit.

Sitansu Maitra (1967) considers the tricks on Falstaff as variants on the expulsion of Carnival. In a lecture to the English Association J. A. Bryant (1971) suggests that Falstaff is a 'scapegoat for a community afflicted generally by the lust and greed for which some of its members seek to make him solely responsible'.[16]

All's Well that Ends Well

Janet Spens relates the play to the folk plays of Shrovetide or hocktide. Part of the hocktide festivities was the struggle for a head or a hood, and she finds a hint of this in the ragging of Parolles (IV.3). She also suggests that the 'hocking' of men by women in this festival is parallelled in Helena's 'capture' of Bertram.[17]

Some of the folk and mythical motifs in the play, such as the healing of the king and the fulfilment of the task, which I have mentioned in the last chapter, can also be considered as ritual motifs. The bed-trick could also be interpreted as a survival of ritual love-making to ensure fertility of the land.

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[16] Frye, 'The Argument of Comedy', p. 86; Maitra, Psychological Realism and Archetypes: The Trickster in Shakespeare, p. 129; Bryant, reported in The Shakespeare Newsletter (February, 1971), p. 6.

[17] Spens, pp. 38-41.

Measure for Measure

I have already discussed A. D. Nuttall's argument that beneath the structure of the play is the shadowy substructure of the scapegoat ritual. Nuttall however is concerned with the idea of the scapegoat rather than with pointing out specific parallels with particular primitive rituals. Apart from his essay, I have not discovered any discussion of the play as ritual.

The History Plays

In the history plays the concept of ritual has been operative primarily in the sense of formal actions and ceremonies, of which there are many in the plays. Anthropological ideas enter the discussions, however, not merely because there are some parallels drawn between the plays and primitive rituals (especially in connexion with Falstaff), but also because ritual in the plays is held to be an expression of a sacramental view of the world and of kingship, just as it is supposed to be in primitive culture. It is in this general sense that the concept of ritual has been frequently employed in discussions of the plays.

The clearest expression of this sacramental function of ritual in the histories is provided by G. Wilson Knight (1936) from whom I would like to quote a rather lengthy passage:

> To all these kingly plays we must bring a sense of the sacramental. They challenge our modern understanding on a vital issue. Kingship is closely related to the essence of poetic drama, which seems never properly to have recovered from the execution of Charles I. Today the problem, to the would-be dramatic artist, is baffling. How many plays of Shakespeare are without their king or duke? Even the fairies are a royalistic community. Kingship is central to Shakespeare's life-pattern and whatever our political philosophy we must receive such significances correctly and unfold them on the stage with due ceremonial and a willing suspension of disrespect. They are grand plays. In them surges the tumultuous energy of the soul of a nation; they

> are rich in the pride, pomp and circumstance of earthly power.[18]

The rituals of kingship in the plays, in other words, served to bring the whole nation together in a sort of mystic communion, much as royal pomp and ceremony is supposed to do even now.

Eric La Guardia (1966) takes a different view of the ceremonial nature of these plays. He argues, following Tillyard, I think (see the section on Richard II below), that the second tetralogy traces a 'progress' from 'ceremony to history', from 'divinity to mortality', and from a 'golden' world to a 'brazen' world. 'Ceremony,' he writes, 'takes a sacramental view of nature; it operates within mythical rather than historical time; it attempts to preserve the order of culture in opposition to the disorderly flow of human experience.' The change from the 'mystical kingship' of Richard II to the rational kingship of Henry V is not presented, according to La Guardia, as either a progress or regress, but rather as a dramatization of 'man's continuous participation in both the mythical and the historical'. He goes on to demonstrate his thesis by an analysis of the kinds of language used by Richard and Henry: ritualistic and sacramental in one case, and rhetorical and rational in the other. Alvin Kernan (1969) comes to a similar conclusion about the second tetralogy, which he describes as Shakespeare's Henriad. According to him the tetralogy describes, to put it briefly, 'a movement from ceremony and ritual to history and drama'.[19] In other words, one can say, Shakespeare's histories dramatize the very process which made it possible for them to be written, namely, the change from a mythical, ceremonial world-order, with little sense of historical forces, to a historical mode of understanding political reality.

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[18] Shakespearian Production, p. 150.

[19] La Guardia, 'Ceremony and History : The Problem of Symbol from Richard II to Henry V, pp. 70-1; Kernan, 'The Henriad: Shakespeare's Major History Plays', p. 3.

Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III

J. P. Brockbank (1953) suggests, without elaborating, that Henry VI has the 'dramatic role of sacrificial victim' in these plays.[20]

Sigurd Burckhardt (1967), commenting on the scene between the Countess of Auvergne and Talbot (I Henry VI, II.3), makes a point similar to Eric La Guardia's and Alvin Kernan's about the change from a ceremonial to a more functional style of life. The blunt, functional language of Talbot represents, according to him, the new style of life and manners that was to replace the feudal ceremonialism of the warring barons.[21]

Richard III

I have already mentioned (in Chapter 6) Brockbank's suggestion that in the scene in which Richard is cursed by the ghosts of his victims there is a brief hint that he is capable of assuming the role of the sacrificial victim. Norman Holland's comment (also quoted there) on the mythic pattern of the play is also obviously relevant since this pattern of the good king killing the bad boar-king and making the land fertile once more could also be the pattern of primitive rituals of king-killing. A. P. Rossiter (1938) uses Clifford Leech's distinction between 'ritual' and 'document' to argue that the play, like ritual, 'conveys homage' to the power of human will embodied in Richard. But at the same time it also reconciles the hearers 'to the destruction of an "admirable" man as an affirmation of a divinely-directed principle of order'. If I understand Rossiter rightly, then, Richard is the scape-goat in whom we enjoy our own aggressive impulses before exorcising them by killing him.[22]

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[20] 'Shakespeare's Historical Myth', p. 39.

[21] ' "I am but shadow of myself" : Ceremony and design in I Henry VI', pp. 157-8.

[22] Rossiter, 'The Structure of Richard the Third', esp. pp. 73-4. For Leech, see p. 47 above.

King John

I have not discovered any discussion of the play in terms of ritual.

Richard II

The ceremonial nature of this play has been remarked upon by several writers. John Dover Wilson (1939) compares the whole play to the Catholic Mass. He also refers to ritual king-killing in the following passage, where he is commenting on Pater's comparison (1889) of the abdication to an 'inverted rite, like those old ecclesiastical or military ones'. Dover Wilson writes:

> This goes to the heart of the play, since it reveals a sacramental quality in the agony and death of the sacrificial victim, as it were of the god slain upon the altar, which we to-day can only begin to understand by reading a book like The Golden Bough.

E. M. W. Tillyard (1944) considers the play to be 'the most formal and ceremonial' of all Shakespeare's plays. I have already mentioned (in the previous chapter) Bryant's suggestion that the play presents 'ritual analogy with the sacrifice on the cross'. William G. McCollom (1945) has also commented on the formal, ritual nature of the play.[23] Generally speaking, one can say, the ritual element in this play is associated with a way of life rather than with specific rituals.

I and II Henry IV and Henry V

Critics have concentrated on the ritualistic aspect of Falstaff's role in the plays, and there seems to be a consensus that he is like the scapegoat of primitive rituals. Dover Wilson (1944) anticipates many ideas connected with such interpretations, but without referring to

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[23] Walter Pater, Appreciations, Pocket ed. (London, 1924), pp. 205-6; Dover Wilson, Introduction to the Cambridge edition of Richard II (1939), pp. xiii-xvi; Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 251; McCollom, 'Formalism and Illusion in Shakespearian Drama: 1595-1598', pp. 447-8.

anthropological concepts. I have already quoted, in the previous chapter, his remark that Falstaff has become 'a kind of god in the mythology of modern man', performing the role of Bacchus and Silenus in the modern age. Insofar as Falstaff represents the exhilarating freedom from social restraints, he is like Carnival. And although Dover Wilson does not mention Carnival and his expulsion at the end of the festive occasion, it is obvious that Falstaff is expelled. (We might also remark that Bacchus-Dionysus is a dying god.) Dover Wilson does, however, suggest that the 'English spirit' (C. L. Barber would perhaps say the 'folk spirit') needs order as well as liberty, and that the play celebrated a 'double coronation' : of the 'English Bacchus' as well as the 'English Harry'.[24] For the English spirit, then, mere festivity is not enough and must be put in its proper place. This is an argument which anticipates C. L. Barber's.

J.I.M. Stewart (1949) explains the rejection of Falstaff as an example of the expulsion of the scapegoat and the ritual killing of the father-king (Falstaff becoming a father-substitute through the familiar process of displacement). Stewart writes:

> Falstaff is in the end the dethroned and sacrificed king, the scapegoat as well as the sweet beef. For Falstaff, so Bacchic, so splendidly with the Maenads Doll and Mistress Quickly a creature of the wine-cart and the cymbal, so fit a sacrifice (as Hal early discerns) to lard the lean, the barren earth, is of that primitive and magical world upon which all art, even if with a profound unconsciousness, draws.

Philip Williams (1957) comes to a very similar conclusion about the role of Falstaff. He also believes that Falstaff is a father-substitute for Hal and that his expulsion is like the sacrifice of a scapegoat. Finally, C. L. Barber compares the expulsion of Falstaff to the trial and expulsion of Carnival, but suggests that whereas generally Shakespeare places the 'release' of festivity within a larger pattern suggested through comic irony in order that it may lead to 'clarification', in this play he has

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[24] Dover Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff, p. 128.

recourse to a ritual method of putting Carnival in his place rather than an ironic one. To this extent, then, according to Barber, the play represents a failure of irony. In using the ritual method to expel Falstaff, Shakespeare has used the theatre 'as a substitute for ritual, without the commitment to participation and discipline proper to ritual nor the commitment to the fullest understanding proper to comedy or tragedy'.[25]

Thus we see that starting from the point that the expulsion of Falstaff resembles an act of ritual magic, Stewart and Williams on the one hand, and Barber on the other, come to precisely opposite conclusions. The two former critics 'explain' the expulsion in terms of the ritual and thus justify it, whereas Barber uses the ritual analogy to explain the unsatisfactoriness of the expulsion of Falstaff. It would seem, then, that the critical problem whether Falstaff's expulsion is satisfactory or not must be settled before we go on to explain it as a survival of 'atavic' impulses (to use J.I.M. Stewart's term).

Henry VIII

G. Wilson Knight[26] comments on the ceremonial aspects of the play, but there is little else which is relevant to the ritual approach.

The Tragedies

Titus Andronicus

I have already discussed (in the previous chapter) Desmonde's analysis of the play in terms of primitive puberty rites for male and female initiates.

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[25] Stewart, Character and Motive in Shakespeare, p. 139; Williams, 'The Birth and Death of Falstaff Reconsidered', esp. p. 363; Barber, pp. 220-1. For a general discussion of the ritual origins of the Fool, see Enid Welsford, The Fool (1935), Chs. III and IV.

[26] The Crown of Life, pp. 318ff.

Romeo and Juliet

The deaths of Romeo and Juliet are, in some ways, sacrificial acts for the atonement of the two warring families. Hapgood (1965) argues, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, that in this play, as in Titus Andronicus and Richard III, Shakespeare shows the complete success of the sacrificial rite, while in Julius Caesar and Richard II he shows its complete failure. Wigston's analysis of the play also made use of parallels with esoteric rituals as well as myths.

Julius Caesar

Brents Stirling (1951) remarks that the theme of 'incantation and ritual' is prominent throughout the play. Brutus, he argues, tries to ritualize the murder of Caesar as a sacrificial act for the good of Rome, whereas Antony tries to invert this ceremonial formula. Like Richard II, then, the play presents the failure of the ritual attitude to political action.[27] This is a point taken up by Robert Hapgood in his essay on the role of ritual in Shakespeare's early tragedies, to which I have already referred. In this view of ritual in the plays, the plays are not to be taken simply as rituals or as embodiments of ritual, but rather as presenting ritual and the attitudes that go with it in a critical perspective which, especially in the later tragedies, brings out both the failures and successes of ritual. In this play, however, the emphasis is held to be on the tragic failure of ritual.

Hamlet

Gilbert Murray (1914) was the first to use the concept of the tragic hero as scapegoat in his discussion of the origins of Hamlet and the Orestes saga. We saw in the previous chapter how Murray tries to synthesize the theme of seasonal myths with the scapegoat ritual, and suggested that the synthesis left some doubts about the very outlines of

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27. "Or else this were a savage spectacle" ', esp. pp. 766-7.

the rituals. Hamlet, according to Murray, is the bitter fool who must slay the king and be slain in turn. In this respect Hamlet is the scapegoat who takes on himself the fatal duty of cleansing the state of its evil elements. Janet Spens (1916) also interprets the play in terms of ritual king-killing. Both Murray and Miss Spens compare the play with the Oresteia of Aeschylus.[28]

Perhaps the most famous essay on the play to use the concept of ritual is Francis Fergusson's discussion of it in The Idea of a Theater (1949). Fergusson's intention is not merely to suggest the parallel with primitive scapegoat ritual, but also to argue that the play is ritualistic in a functional sense as well, performing for the Elizabethan age a function similar to that of the theatre of Sophocles in Ancient Greece, namely, 'the "celebration of the mystery" of human life'.[29]

The parallel to the ritual action is described by Fergusson as follows:

> The main action of Hamlet may be described as the attempt to find and destroy the hidden "imposthume" which is poisoning the life of Claudius' Denmark. All of the characters -- from Polonius with his "windlasses" and "assays of bias," to Hamlet with his parables and symbolic shows -- realize this action, in comic, or evil, or inspired ways. And the organic parts of the plot -- the movement of the play as a whole -- show forth the beginning, middle, and end of this action according to the traditional scheme.[30]

This action is realized, according to Fergusson, through the story and characters as well as through a series of ritualistic and improvisational scenes. The rituals in the play (Fergusson gives as examples such scenes as the changing of the guards, the ceremonies

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[28] Murray, 'Hamlet and Orestes', p. 41; Spens, pp. 75-9.

[29] Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater, p. 114.

[30] Ibid., p. 109.

at the court of Claudius, Ophelia's funeral, and the duel between Hamlet and Laertes) provide moments in which the plot-lines are, as it were, gathered together: 'the issues are held in suspension, and we are reminded of the traditional social values in which all have some sort of stake'. They serve, Fergusson continues, 'to focus attention on the Danish body politic and its hidden malady: they are the ceremonious invocations of the well-being of society, and secular or religious devices for securing it'. On the other hand the improvisations (e.g. Hamlet's sermon on drunkenness; his exchanges with Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the players, the joking with the gravediggers) are individualistic actions that throw doubt upon the efficacy of the official magic'. The play within the play is both ritual and improvisational entertainment, 'and shows the Prince as at once clown and ritual head of the state'. Fergusson writes:

> The rituals, the stories, and the improvisations together make the peculiar rhythm of Hamlet as a performance. Denmark is shown as waiting, as it were, in the darkness of its ineffective ceremonies and hollow communal prayer while the infection, "mining all within," divides every man in secret from every other and bursts forth, from time to time, in savage but brief and ineffective fights.

The mana has departed, as it were, from the ritual acts owing to some desecration. Only the sacrifice of a royal victim can restore it.[31]

Fergusson points out that Hamlet is different from Oedipus in this important respect:

> Even the ritual process itself is, in Hamlet, directly dramatized : i.e., presented in a tragic, ironic light. There are no rituals in Oedipus : Oedipus is a ritual. But Hamlet has an extremely modern and skeptical, a Pirandellesque, theatricality as well; Shakespeare plays with the basis of his own make-believe.

But in spite of this, Shakespeare never, according to Fergusson, satirizes the values and beliefs associated with the rituals; if they are

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[31] Ibid., pp. 113-14.

shown to be ineffective, then their failure is presented as tragic rather than absurd. This is so because the role of the monarch in Shakespeare's time is held to have been similar to that of Sophocles's Oedipus and Creon: the monarch 'was at once ruler, high priest, and father of the community'.[32]

Fergusson's ideas have been developed by other critics and also applied to other plays. Robert Hapgood's essay on Shakespeare's 'maimed rites', for example, elaborates upon the idea that in Hamlet the ritual of kingship is presented as having lost its mana, though without any questioning of the foundation of belief in ritual. Fergusson's essay itself may be seen as an independent confirmation of Philip Wheelwright's argument (1942) that the Elizabethan attitude toward myth was delicately balanced between scepticism and belief, and also of Robert B. Heilman's point (1948) that Shakespeare's tragedy presents 'myth in crisis'.[33] John Holloway (1961) puts forward the theory that the effect of Shakespearean tragedy, like that of primitive rites of sacrifice, is 'a strengthening and deepening of the spectator's sense of community with his fellows'. This is an aspect of the ritual of kingship as Fergusson sees it, but Holloway refers to him only to misinterpret his emphasis on the ritual and improvisational elements, suggesting that what Fergusson means by ritual in the play is merely that 'it frequently stages public ceremonies'.[34] This almost wilful misinterpretation of Fergusson's essay goes, I think, with Holloway's presenting as new, in 1961, a theory about the relation between the tragic hero and the scapegoat that is at least fifty years old.

William Montgomerie (1956) tries to study ritual and folk elements in the play from the point of view of a folklorist. Like the

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[32] Ibid., pp. 117-19.

[33] Heilman, 'The Lear World', p. 45; for Wheelwright, see p. 74 above.

[34] Holloway, The Story of the Night, pp. 146, 176.

majority of folklorists his interest is largely antiquarian. But Montgomerie does try to draw a parallel between the role of Hamlet and that of the hero in the Grail legend, which was a ritual role. He also draws, rather unconvincingly, a parallel between the dumb-show in the play-within-the-play and the mummers' plays. The fact that in the mummers' plays it is medicine which is poured through the ear to revive a dead man, whereas in Hamlet it is poison designed to kill is explained as 'an Italian intrusion in a typically English ritual where the killing was traditionally by the sword'. The pouring of poison in the ear is thus considered to be both a parallel to the mummers' play and an Italian intrusion. Montgomerie also mentions some other ritual elements. For example, he maintains that Claudius's flight from Hamlet's play is the survival of a traditional ritual, of which the annual flight of the priest-king at Rome (the Regifugium) was the type.[35]

F. V. Morley (1959) also seeks to explain the play in terms of Elizabethan folk festivals. He argues that in Shakespeare's time the hocktide festival coincided with the 'mockery of the Danes', which was a ritual play about the defeat of the Danes. There are, he suggests, elements of this play, or at least of the tribal attitudes that were expressed in such folk plays, in the play of Hamlet. Thus, Hamlet is ineffectual because the stereotype Dane is ineffectual. Hamlet, according to Morley, is merely a traditional character, not a person. And he cannot win because the hocktide tradition is against him.[36]

John Holloway sets out to trace the recurrent pattern in the major tragedies of Shakespeare. He describes it as follows:

> This pattern has as its centre a very distinctive role pursued by the protagonist over the whole course of the play : a role which takes him from being a cynosure of his society to being estranged from it, and takes him, through a process of increasing alienation, to a point at which what happens to him

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[35] 'Folk Play and Ritual in Hamlet', esp. pp. 220, 226.

[36] 'The Impersonal Hamlet', pp. 9-10, 18-22.

> suggests the expulsion of the scapegoat, or the sacrifice of a victim, or something of both.[37]

Holloway admits, however, that this pattern does not fit Hamlet as well as some of the other tragedies.

Charles W. Eckert (1963) undertakes a detailed analysis of the common elements in the Hamlet and Orestes sagas and the Roman legend of Junius Brutus. Examples of these common elements are : a hero whose uncle murders his father and marries his mother; a feigning of madness by the hero (in the Ambales saga the hero goes to the extent of reducing himself to an animal-like state); misogyny; killing of the king's councillor; exile, dangerous voyage, return, and revenge on the usurper. Some of these motifs may, of course, be missing from a particular version of any of the legends. Eckert suggests that all these motifs are not explicable in terms of 'an initiatory or a regicidal or a scapegoat paradigm'. He goes on to suggest that the study of a broader paradigm that any of these is needed to explain all the common elements. The paradigm that he puts forward is that of 'two of the oldest and most universal bodies of ritual activities -- purgative or apotropaic ceremonies (Greek katharmoi, apotrope) and initiatory rites (Greek teletai)'. The common elements of the stories may be seen, according to Eckert, as the 'mythic corollaries' of these rituals. He writes that the three heroes especially important for his study, 'the Greek Orestes, the Roman Brutus, and the Scandinavian-Christian Hamlet, are all connected with the New Year's festivals and particularly with the purgative and initiatory rituals performed at these times'. Thus, Orestes is associated with the festival of Anthesteria, Brutus, with the Regifugium, which was celebrated in February, and Hamlet, with the New Year and Christmas festival.[38]

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[37] Holloway, p. 135.

[38] 'The Festival Structure of the Orestes-Hamlet Tradition', pp. 324-8, 336.

Eckert divides the festivities into two kinds of rituals, purgative and initiatory, which are, according to him, the social and individual aspects, respectively, of the same symbolic action. The elements of the purgative rites are the procession of the rhabdos, the sphagia, and the holocaust. Both Brutus and Hamlet (in the legend, though not in the play) receive one or two golden staffs during their period of exile; Orestes also carries a 'wool-tufted branch of olive'. All these may be seen as survivals of the rhabdos or purgative wand, and the fact that nearly all the heroes in this tradition carry a wand indicates, Eckert argues, that 'they are engaged in some ritual activity of broader significance than killing a Frazerian king'. The sphagia explains Hamlet's brutal slaying of the king's councillor. This rite, performed during the Greek New Year, has to be distinguished from the thusia, or the 'meal shared with the gods', by the fact that it was usually performed at night, on a low mound or in a trench, with the victim being totally dismembered or burned and his remains buried or cast in water. The purpose of this ritual was not communion but placation and aversion. In Greece and Babylonia the sphagia was followed by the flight of the officiant. This detail of the plot, Eckert suggests, is easily rationalized, as in the case of Hamlet's exile, which is so natural that the reader would not suspect any ritual significance 'were the exile not preceded by the brutal sphagia'. (In Hamlet, I would like to add, the brutality is reflected not in the killing as such, but rather in Hamlet's sentiments toward the dead Polonius.) Finally, the holocaust is reflected in the Hamlet tradition in the burning of the hall with all the courtiers in it. In the play, of course, no such holocaust takes place, but the fact that the term is often used as a metaphor to describe multiple deaths like those at the end of this play may suggest a connexion between the play and the ritual tradition.[39]

The initiatory rites whose traces can be seen in the stories of this tradition closely parallel the rites of the New Year Festival: they

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[39] Ibid., pp. 329-30.

occur at an individual rather than a social period of crisis, and effect a personal rather than a social death and regeneration'. The initiatory rites of Greece and Northern Europe were, as Eckert points out, similar in structure. The chief rites were: removal of boys from their homes; period of frightening seclusion in hut or woods where they might be forced to live like wild animals; ordeals; instructions; mock or real tyrannizing of women to symbolize transcendence of feminine ties; the investing of the initiates with adult objects or articles of clothing and return to the social group. This, according to Eckert, is 'the scenario at the most primitive level, and the myths we are considering represent various stages of rationalization'. The Hamlet saga, according to him, is the most conservative, or primitive, and part of this primitiveness is no doubt carried over into the play. One of the elements of these rituals reflected in the play is Hamlet's madness (an example, according to Eckert, of the 'telestic madness' that Plato refers to in the Phaedrus), which is otherwise only superficially rationalized as 'feigned'. This madness corresponds to the stage in the initiation ritual when the boys are forced to live like wild animals (beast-like = mad; cf. 'berserk' = etymologically, warrior or initiate dressed in beast's skin). The tyrannizing of women is reflected in nearly all the variants of the legends; in the play it is quite obviously reflected in Hamlet's misogyny. The voyages undertaken by many of the heroes, including Hamlet, correspond to the ordeals that the initiate must undergo before being finally accepted in his community.[40]

In the Hamlet-Orestes tradition, according to Eckert, the initiatory and the purgative rituals are combined, the hero-priest who drives away evil must himself, like an initiate, be purified first. He concludes:

> The basis for the purgative-regenerative and initiatory patterns found both in the festivals and in the myths is the universal gestalten of death and rebirth. Because the social and the personal rites are superimposed in the myths, the

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[40] Ibid., pp. 331-5.

pattern becomes fugal in its complexity, obscuring the essentially simple theme for readers who no longer live intimately with both the myths and rituals. That a hero should undergo initiation (i.e., perfecting, preparation) before accomplishing his destiny answers a psycho-logic that is as operative in modern fiction as in the Hamlet sagas; but the specific initiatory activities in which he engages are no longer initiatory to us, and may impress us as so much "clumsy supernaturalism."[41]

Eckert's account of the ritual aspects of the Hamlet saga and play is, I think, the most convincing of such accounts. It is certainly the most detailed and manages to explain more of the play than Gilbert Murray's essay, or Morley's or Montgomerie's.

Troilus and Cressida

I have not found any discussion of ritual elements in this play.

Othello

Othello, too, has not attracted the attention of the ritualists. Holloway does point out the general ritual pattern of events in the course of which the hero moves from being the cynosure of all eyes to a victim (in this case, almost a monster), but he suggests that Othello's is a personal tragedy rather than a sacrifice for the welfare of the community. 'There is, in this play,' he writes, 'less sense than in Hamlet, and indeed there is virtually no sense at all, of a society which is swept along with the protagonist and suffers a decline parallel to his own.'[42]

King Lear

Janet Spens connects Lear, along with Jaques, with the Fool in the sword play. Shakespeare realized, she writes, that 'the story of the Summer-King or Fool who is slain, is the story of pitiful human decay

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[41] Ibid., p. 336.

[42] Holloway, p. 50.

and death, of the passing of the generations'. Indeed, according to her, the figure of the pharmakos or scapegoat is the very essence of tragedy.[43] She does not explain, however, how the parallel between the Fool of the sword play and Lear could be meaningful when that Fool, unlike Lear, springs back to life after being slain by his sons.

Sarah Anne Davidson (1931), using the ideas of Frazer, Gilbert Murray, Jane Harrison, and Janet Spens, argues that King Lear is a scapegoat-figure, a year-daimon who is finally sacrificed. To demonstrate this thesis she tries to find out 'what in the background of the mythological Lear might fit him for such a role'. She relates Lear to the myth of Cecrops and his three daughters and suggests that Cecrops might be a 'year-daimon, a symbol of Reincarnation', since he is associated with a serpent and is himself part-serpent. One of the daughters is faithful while the other two are not, which relates them, according to Miss Davidson, to the three daughters of Lear. And as the cult of the daughters of Cecrops was associated with the carrying of dew during the festival of Hersephoria, the daughters themselves may be personifications of dew. This again, in Miss Davidson's view, links the myth with rituals of the year-daimon and May Day festivities.[44]

The more immediate background for the play is in Celtic legend, and Miss Davidson comes to the conclusion that the Celtic legend of Llyr is also based on rituals of the year-daimon. Llyr (to put her argument very briefly) means the sea; the sea is often, in Celtic legend, associated with darkness, hence there must be an implication of a king of light who opposes the king of darkness, a summer king versus a winter king. Llyr's wife in some versions of the legend is actually the wife of Lug, the sun god. Llyr is thus associated both with light and darkness. Or, one can say, Llyr and Lug are different aspects of the year-daimon. Also, in another version of the legend, it is said that two men fight every first

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[43] Spens, pp. 49-52.

[44] 'King Lear, Scapegoat', pp. 118-22.

day of May for the hand of Cordeyella or Creiddylad, the daughter of Leir. Hence she too is associated with the theme of the battle between the seasons. Coming then to discuss Lear in particular, Miss Davidson points out that according to Gilbert Murray there are two types of vegetation kings: the summer-king, and the winter-king, who is in reality the summer-king's slayer grown proud and royal. Lear, she suggests, is of the second type, the old winter king who is made the scapegoat. Like the primitive scapegoat he is both sacred and taboo, the sacredness being reflected in what Kent calls 'authority' and the sense of the taboo in his madness.[45]

Douglas Hewitt (1949) links the idea of the scapegoat function of Lear more directly to the response of the Elizabethan audience than Miss Spens or Miss Davidson manage to do, in spite of their references to the English folk plays. Hewitt suggests that in spite of Christianity, old pagan festivals had survived in Elizabethan times, for example: the carrying out of death to ensure a good harvest, the morris and the sword dances, the mummers' plays, and the May games. All these, according to Hewitt, were different forms of the worship of the god of fertility, and,

> just as Greek Tragedy, which originated in the worship of Dionysos, derived part of its force from its religious associations, so Elizabethan drama, when performed to an audience responsive to the folk ceremonies from which the plays sprang, may have made certain appeals which are now lost.

The audience's awareness of the folk ceremonies modified their response to the play in two ways in particular. The parallel between the role of Lear in the play and the role of the scapegoat, a parallel of which they could hardly have been unaware, must have given a certain sense of inevitability to Lear's expulsion and death. The ritual role is laid down, given, and the character can improvise upon it only to a very limited extent. Hence it is obvious that the individual character of the scapegoat-

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[45] Ibid., pp. 122-5, 129-132.

king would not be important; any conflict within him would become not an individual psychological conflict, but a more general conflict of values. Secondly, the hero-as-scapegoat was yet another manifestation of the link between the microcosm and the macrocosm that has been shown by Tillyard and others to have been such a marked feature of the Elizabethan world picture. This linking of the hero-scapegoat with the welfare of the whole community gave to Lear and other tragic heroes their importance and dignity. Already, however, according to Hewitt, this world-picture was fading away and

> the feeling persists, as one contrasts Shakespeare with later dramatists, that he wrote at the last moment when this background of vague and misunderstood myth could combine with other beliefs and attitudes to produce the sense of inevitability and of the solidarity of the protagonists with their people which the finest tragedy demands.[46]

William Empson (1951) briefly hints at a different way of looking at the concept of the scapegoat. Lear, he suggests, as the scapegoat:

> who has collected all this wisdom for us is viewed at the end with a sort of hushed envy, not . . . really because he has become wise but because the general human desire for experience has been glutted in him; he has been through everything.
>
> We that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long.[47]

John Holloway (1961) also takes up the scapegoat motif in the play and comes to a more balanced, if not remarkably original, view of its role in the play than either Miss Spens or Miss Davidson, largely, I think, because he does not concern himself with the tracing of misleading or incomplete parallels with specific myths and folk plays, but confines his attention to what he calls the 'vertebrate structure of its intrinsic design; the developing line, unabridged, of a human sacrifice'. It is true, he admits,

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[46] Hewitt, 'The Very Pompes of the Divell -- Popular and Folk Elements in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama', pp. 10-11, 15, 22.

[47] Empson, The Structure of Complex Words, p. 157.

that the death of Lear is 'realistically the outcome of the human situation of the play', but it has also, at the same time, 'the quality of stylized and ritual execution'.[48] This is, of course, very similar to the point made by Hewitt about the inevitability of the hero's expulsion and death and may be considered to be an independent confirmation of it.

William Frost (1957) brings a different concept of ritual to bear on this play. He is concerned not so much with a specific ritual such as that of the scapegoat as with the idea of ritual as such. He argues that in Elizabethan drama ritual has a function analogous to that of disguise, and like it is probably connected with the very nature of drama. Ritual, or 'ceremonial situation', works to free actors and playwrights from the demands of verisimilitude, 'for the participants in a rite are assumed a priori to act parts and to speak languages not simply their own or natural to them as individuals, but traditional or appropriate in some way to a publicly acknowledged occasion'. Frost extends the term ritual to include 'any speech or situation which will be felt by participants or spectators to be predictable in important aspects'. Ritual in drama has its drawbacks. For example, as Frost points out, it blots out the individuality of character, mechanizes the action, and is an 'added temptation to the dramatist to extract an added frisson from ritual by interrupting it'. With this preamble, Frost goes on to study the role of ritual in King Lear, concentrating on the first scene. This scene, which according to him is the most ritualistic in the play, is appropriate because, apart from the fact that it harmonizes with the mythic or folklore nature of the story, it helps to produce, through its 'machine-like quality of ritual', precisely the effect of 'nightmarish inevitability most useful . . . for certain sorts of tragedy'. This ritual is contrasted in the play with a number of other elements. It is contrasted, for example, with the realistic or non-ritualistic prose of Kent and Gloucester in this scene. This provides a bridge between the ritual and the naturalistic drama and also throws the ritual into relief. There is also the contrast between the ritual

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[48] Holloway, p. 98.

in this scene and the scenes in Goneril's household and the storm. The latter scene embodies a parody of all the ritual acts of the first scene. Finally, there is the contrast between the opening and the conclusion, where 'ritual has lost all relevance to the king' and the king and Cordelia have lost all relevance to the new rituals and to the play. Frost concludes:

> We are now in the presence, not of the ceremonies by which human beings encompass their condition, the rites of passage of the anthropologists; but of the barest facts of that condition itself. King and daughter, no longer figures in myth or allegory, come before us fragile, irreplaceable, and particular, a pair of jailbirds and losers.[49]

Thus we see that according to Frost the play presents not a ritual pattern of events, but rather the failure of ritual, in a manner somewhat similar to that in Hamlet (where also, as Fergusson pointed out, the rituals of kingship have lost all their mana), but with a far more radical questioning of the efficacy of ritual as such. Judah Stampfer (1960) also argues that the play presents a failure of ritual, but this time it is held to be a failure of the rituals of penance. Finally, Maynard Mack (1965) also comments on the play's radical questioning of theefficacy or ritual. Referring to the passage beginning 'Plate sin with gold . . . ', he writes:

> No one, I suspect, who had responded to the role of the king in Shakespeare's history plays, or the king's role in contemporary drama generally, could miss the shock in these lines, coming as they did from "the thing itself." If we suppose, further, that the structural conventions of the Elizabethan theatre, with its "very solid three-dimensional symbols of order" representing "home, city, and king," sometimes induced in observers a deeper identification, a sense that they were witnessing in the career of the stage monarch a "sacred combat" or ritual struggle that enacted the corporate (and individual) quest for well-being and self-knowledge in the person of the king, we may guess that the shock of this

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[49] Frost, 'Shakespeare's Rituals and the opening of King Lear', pp. 577-80, 584.

reversal was profound indeed.[50]

Finally, I would like to mention very briefly an entirely different application of the concepts of myth and ritual to this play. In an interesting unpublished doctoral dissertation (1970) Michael Howard Riley develops a complex terminological network within which he tries to place the two tragedies of Lear and Sejanus. It would take too large a space to consider adequately Mr. Riley's distinction between what he calls 'sociodrama' and 'psychodrama'. Briefly, he describes the difference thus: Sociodrama involves 'participation of groups of "actors" and attempts to state and resolve a problem or conflict inherent in social relations'. Examples of such sociodrama are to be found, according to Mr. Riley, in primitive as well as sophisticated societies, for example, in the African 'rituals of rebellion' that have been studied by Max Gluckman and Monica Wilson, and in the traditional medieval festivals of the 'boy bishop' and the 'lord of misrule'. Ben Jonson's Sejanus is studied as an example, in literary form, of this primitive archetype of drama. The other primitive archetype of drama is the solitary trance performance of a shaman or medicine man who acts out, in Mr. Riley's words, a 'myth' which is resolutely asocial and other-worldly. This 'ecstatic dramatization of an "inner" state of consciousness' is called psychodrama, and Lear is put forward as a literary example of it. 'King Lear's spiritual journey,' writes Mr. Riley, 'is a literary "rediscovery" of the shaman's mediation between the perceptible world and the mysteries of "nature" as well as the hearts of men.'[51]

I do not find many of Mr. Riley's terms and distinctions very illuminating. The following table that he builds up on the basis of several equations I find particularly unconvincing. The table is meant

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[50] Stampfer, 'The Catharsis of King Lear', esp., p. 10; Mack, 'King Lear' in Our Time, pp. 107-8.

[51] Riley, 'Ritual and the Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy', pp. iii-v.

to describe two approaches to human behaviour, and is as follows:

Myth : Psychodrama		Ritual : Sociodrama
psychological vocabularies ('myths' of infant behaviour)	. . . . .	sociological vocabularies (social 'rituals')
'dream', 'conflict of desire and reality'	. . . . (Frye) . .	'ritual', plot and conventional action
'dialectical transcendence'	(Kenneth Burke) . .	'dramatic catharsis'
'magic-imagination'	(C. L. Barber) . .	'ritual-social action'
mythico-linguistic thought	. . (Cassirer) . .	discursive-topical thought
Shaman	. . . . .	'Appointed' agent [52]

The kind of identifications involved in this kind of model-making is very similar to the identifications by association that we saw as one of the characteristics not only of myth-criticism, but also of the mythical mind itself. Besides, in his interpretations of the terms of Barber and Frye, Mr. Riley is very badly off the track.

Nevertheless, in drawing a distinction between the kind of ritual scapegoat action observable in Sejanus and the interest in the hero as an individual in Lear, Mr. Riley does, I believe, make a very useful point. It is true in many ways, it seems to me, that Ben Jonson's characters are more in the nature of agents performing a role than individuals with their own past histories (or, as Mr. Riley would put it, their own private 'myths'); his art, as T. S. Eliot has put it, is 'of the surface'.[53] The characters in Shakespeare's tragedies, on the other hand, certainly in Lear and Hamlet, seem to be more than mere roles; roles are imposed on them, but then the interest lies as much in the conflict between role and character as in the role itself. Moreover, in Lear (and in this respect the play may be thought to be different from the other tragedies) the maintenance or regeneration of society does not

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[52] Ibid., pp. 24, 177, 214.

[53] Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 155.

seem to be an important preoccupation. Throughout the interest lies in the lesson learned by Lear in his shamanistic (as Mr. Riley would put it) trance of madness. In this respect, then, it is possible to argue that the ritual of the scapegoat or of sacrifice that Holloway and others have traced in the play is quite irrelevant because such rituals tend to reduce character to mere role and to place social regeneration above the individual discovery of truth.

Macbeth

Many of the interpretations of the play as a nature myth are also obviously relevant to this chapter since the myth is usually related to actual seasonal rituals. In fact Simrock, who probably first proposed the analogy with the Grünewald legend, makes it quite clear, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, that 'the legend of the moving forest originated in the German religious custom of May festivals'.[54] In this play, perhaps more than in any other, the suggestions of seasonal rituals, of driving out the Old Year and bringing in the New, are very strong. Janet Spens tried to relate the revenge theme in this play as well as in Hamlet and some other plays to this annual deposition of one king by another.[55] But this is perhaps too great an extension of the concept of the scapegoat ritual.

John Holloway also interprets Macbeth's role in terms of the scapegoat ritual. A certain vagueness in the concept of the scapegoat that I mentioned earlier is quite evident from the following passage from his discussion of the play:

> As the powers of good re-assert themselves, our perspective is shifted once more . . . We are invited to see him [Macbeth] as a kind of ritual victim : a scapegoat, a lord of misrule, who has turned life into riot for his limited time, and is then driven out and destroyed by the forces which embody the fertile vitality

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[54] See the section on this play in Ch. 6 above.

[55] Spens, pp. 76, 79 ff.

> and the communal happiness of the social group. A vital part of the interest of these closing scenes is Macbeth's own growing consciousness of how what he has done futilely defies these forces, and is sterile and self-destroying.[56]

To call Macbeth both the lord of misrule and a force associated with sterility is, I suggest, contradictory, for the riotous misrule celebrations are, far from being agents of sterility, rather a celebration of phallic vitality, a vitality, however, which must be kept under check if the social order is to be maintained. Macbeth is certainly not the embodiment of this vitality in the way in which Falstaff or Sir Toby Belch may be said to be. Two very different kinds of scapegoat rituals are being implied in Holloway's passage as well as in the comments of Barber on Shylock, Malvolio, and Falstaff. In one, the spirit of unruly, antisocial, libidinal, phallic vitality is sought to be expelled as an expression of social order and hierarchy. This is unrelated to the theme of the country that has been turned into a wasteland because of some secret guilt, which must be isolated and expelled before fertility can return to the land. There are other complicating factors in the concept of the scapegoat which it would be more convenient to deal with at the end of this chapter. I would merely like to point out here that one must be very clear which particular scapegoat ritual or sacrifice one has in mind when explaining a fictional character in terms of this concept.

Nevertheless, one must admit that Macbeth is a peculiarly fascinating play, and that in spite of the psychological verisimilitude with which the feeling of guilt and despair of the central characters is presented, the presence of the ritual elements is very marked in this play, more so, perhaps than any of the other tragedies. Examples of such mythic and ritual elements are : the coming of Birnam Wood against Macbeth, the abnormal birth of Macduff, and the manner of Macbeth's death, with its suggestions of the hunting of an animal, or the execution of a sacrificial victim. There is, moreover, an aura of

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[56] Holloway, p. 73.

the taboo around Macbeth, which reminds one of the ambiguous nature of the scapegoat. The prophecy that 'none of woman born shall harm Macbeth' may be interpreted as an injunction as well as a simple statement about the future. It is perhaps not too much to conjecture that in some primitive version of the story there was a taboo on the killing of the scapegoat-Macbeth by anyone except the properly qualified hero-priest, Macduff. The mana of the scapegoat could only be overpowered, as it were, by the superior mana of the slayer. All these elements combine to give an aura of the primitive to the play.

Antony and Cleopatra

John Holloway finds in this play too the pattern of the scapegoat sacrifice, especially in the manner of the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. Both of them, according to Holloway, fall from being the cynosure of all eyes to a situation where they begin to resemble hunted animals. 'As near to an animal as a human creature can come, the victim is hunted by his own kind until, with whatever justice and whatever nobility, his life is taken. Death is no mere crowning misfortune; it is almost recognized, by protagonist and pursuers alike, as the stylized act which fitly closes a stylized sequence.'[57]

Timon of Athens

Robert C. Elliott (1960) in a fine essay on the play argues that Timon is a satirist-curser in the tradition of primitive railers, whose curses against enemies were based on a belief in word magic. But Shakespeare, according to Professor Elliott, is not to be taken to be identifying with the character of Timon, as some critics have supposed, but rather as showing through the action of the play the failure of such ritual cursing to achieve practical ends. In this way, then, the play can be linked with the others in which Shakespeare has been shown to have been concerned with the failure of ritual or magic (e.g., Richard II).

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[57] Ibid., p. 120.

Elliott writes:

> After his fall from prosperity Timon's language takes on the incantatory tone of a prophet. He tries to preempt the full power of the archaic curse, calling on the gods, the heavens, the earth -- and, as it were, the demonic power within himself -- to confound the hated creature man. It is as though Timon were reenacting the ancient role, attempting to change the world through the power of language. He is a magician manqué, a primitive satirist ages out of his time. Part of his frustration, part of his ultimate humiliation, is the fact that magic is no longer viable. . . . Still the awful words affect us; in obscure ways we are moved by Timon's efforts to manipulate atavistic powers.[58]

Commenting on the sacrificial pattern in the play, Holloway suggests that the barmecide feast is like a parody of the Last Supper and the scene at Timon's cave 'like the baiting of a hunted animal at its den'.[59]

Coriolanus

Holloway, again, finds the sacrificial pattern that he has been tracing through the tragedies, but even more marked in this play and in Timon than in any of the other tragedies. He points out how Coriolanus moves from being the 'observed of all observers' to a monster.[60] The manner of his expulsion from Rome and his death are certainly closer to ritual expulsion and death than the alienation and death of other tragic heroes, with the exception of Macbeth, whose death also suggests very powerfully the ritual execution of the scapegoat.

Kenneth Burke (1966) examines Coriolanus's role as 'a scapegoat whose symbolic sacrifice is designed to afford an audience pleasure'. Coriolanus, according to Burke, is a 'cathartic vessel' because he forces us (and forced the Elizabethan audience) to confront certain social tensions

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[58] The Power of Satire, pp. 165-6.

[59] Holloway, p. 134.

[60] Ibid., pp. 125, 130.

which are finally resolved through his death. Besides, Coriolanus as a railer like Timon points to the ' "curative" function of invective as such when thus released under controlled conditions that transform the repressed into the expressed, yet do us no damage'.[61] Burke's interest in the purgation of social tension through the sacrifice of a scapegoat-figure is, in part, a historical interest, since the social tensions are often peculiar to particular societies at a particular time in history. As such it is properly considered in Chapter 10, which is concerned with the role of myth and ritual in society. However, as some of these tensions, and tension as such, are found to be almost universal, common to primitive as well as the most sophisticated societies, there is also a trans-historical, psychological aspect of this cathartic function of ritual, and it is because of this that Burke's analysis of Coriolanus has been mentioned in this chapter. But it should be kept in mind that his analysis of the scapegoat figure in tragedy is far more subtle and complex than, say, Holloway's, who thinks only in terms of the role of sacrificial rites to ensure social cohesion and a sense of community, without any reference to the socio-historical tensions that the ritual may be seeking to mediate or transcend.

The Romances

The romances, not surprisingly perhaps, have not attracted much attention from a specifically ritualistic point of view. The concept of ritual, in its application in criticism of these plays, is associated, almost without exceptions, with the 'myth and ritual' pattern of death and rebirth that I have discussed in the previous chapter. There are also relatively few attempts to relate these plays to Elizabethan folk plays and ritual. William Barry Thorne does make an attempt to do so, but not, I think, very successfully. His approach amounts to finding seasonal myths and rituals in the plays (he discusses Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale, each in a separate essay), interpreting these myths

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[61] Burke, Language as Symbolic Action, p. 94.

and rituals as embodiments of the theme of rebirth, and then associating them with Elizabethan folk plays, which also, according to him, deal with the same theme. I have discussed Thorne's interpretations briefly in the previous chapter. Janet Spens also suggests a parallel between The Winter's Tale and the harvest feast play.[62] But this amounts to saying no more than that a harvest-feast scene is actually presented in the play. Miss Spens does not go on to discuss whether this could be related to a broader ritual pattern of which the play as a whole could be considered to be a reflection. R.F.C. Tinkler (mentioned in the previous chapter) has some interesting suggestions to make about the connexion of the play with Elizabethan folk culture. He indicates a pattern of death and rebirth and suggests that Mamillius, as a projection of his father, takes on the burden of the scapegoat; he dies in winter, and when we see Perdita and Florizel for the first time, it is spring, that is, the season when the dying god is reborn and the wasteland made fertile once more. The theme of the seasonal cycle, the belief in the 'magical' connexion between the individual and society and nature, as well as some other elements like, for example, the 'savage humour' of many of the scenes, are related by Tinkler to a predominantly agricultural community and the 'conservatism and the distrust of all excess' that go with it.[63] In thus bringing the theme of the seasonal cycle and of death and rebirth from the realm of religion and metaphysics down almost literally to earth, Tinkler makes, I believe, a valuable point. But his kind of criticism is the exception rather than the rule in 'myth and ritual' criticism, especially in the criticism of the last plays. The concept of myth has been found by the critics to be more fruitful in connexion with these plays than the concept of ritual.

The Poems

The poems seem not to have attracted the ritualists at all.

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[62] Spens, p. 38.

[63] Tinkler, 'The Winter's Tale', esp. pp. 346-7, 358, 364.

As I have indicated in Chapter 2, and as can be seen from the mass of criticism surveyed in this chapter, there are two major ways in which the concept of ritual enters the criticism of Shakespeare.[64] First, and most frequently, analogies are drawn between the plays and specific rituals, either in their primitive form or as mediated through Elizabethan folk plays and customs. Secondly, the plays are examined in terms of ritual as such. This approach can be subdivided into two. First, there is criticism in which ritual elements within the play are examined. Ritual in such criticism is generally defined as any kind of formal, non-rational, and non-naturalistic action. The term is further extended to cover such phenomena as the use of formal, stylized speech. Secondly, a play itself may be considered as ritual, or at least as analogous to ritual, not because of its structural similarities to specific primitive rituals, but because it can be thought to be performing, within its own sophisticated society, a function analogous to that of ritual in a primitive society. I would like to take up these different applications of the concept of ritual one by one.

The rituals with which analogies are most frequently drawn, it will be evident from the preceding pages, are connected with the figure of the scapegoat in some form or the other. In the comedies, however, analogies with festive occasions which have little to do with the scapegoat rituals are also drawn. The concept of the scapegoat itself I find very vague and confused. It is associated by Frazer, Jane Harrison, and Gilbert Murray with the dying and reborn deity and the year-daimon. The year-daimon himself is supposed to manifest himself both as the winter and the summer king. But I do not think that the expulsion of the one by the other has necessarily got anything to do with the figure of the scapegoat. Janet Spens writes that Shakespeare realized that 'the story of the Summer-king, or Fool who is slain, is the story of pitiful human decay and death, of the passing of the generations'. This Summer-king she equates with the figure of the pharmakos or scapegoat, whom

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[64] See pp. 46-7 above.

she considers to be the very essence of tragedy.[65] But what has the scapegoat got to do with the passing of generations? If the summer-king is slain by the winter king and is avenged in turn by another summer-king, the analogy which is most obvious is with the actual state of affairs in human and non-human society, where the older ruler is finally deposed by a younger rival, a father by a son. The killing or expulsion of the older figure, either symbolically or literally, may be just a reflection of this fact of nature. Very often the combat between the present ruler and his challenger is ritualized and institutionalized; it is arranged to take place at regular intervals rather than arbitrarily, at the will of the contestants. This may represent the victory of culture over nature, but usually the cultural phenomenon follows the course of natural process: the cycle of winter and spring, the rise of phallic aggression in the mating season. The ritual combat at Nemi may have been an attempt to confine within cultural boundaries the anarchic impulses of nature and thereby to ensure the cohesion of the community. Periodic expulsions of the older rulers, like periodic elections in modern societies, are culture's compromise, as it were, with nature.

The concept of the scapegoat has, in fact, come to be used not only for the expulsion of the Old Year, but also for practically <u>any</u> expulsion or killing in the plays. Thus, Shylock and Malvolio too have been seen as scapegoat figures. But what is more natural, and less ritualistic, I wonder, than to curse and expel an alien figure. It is true that such an action usually follows the <u>transference</u> of some kind of guilt onto these figures (though it is difficult to see even that in the case of Malvolio and Shylock -- they <u>are</u> presented as guilty, but that is a different matter. If the expulsion of all guilty figures were to be equated with the scapegoat ritual, then it would be impossible to make a distinction between a ritual and a non-ritual action). But such transference is usually unconscious and thus very different, I think, from the primitive scapegoat ritual. This is a distinction which is often obscured in the use of the term

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[65] Spens, pp. 51, 58.

scapegoat to describe such recent phenomena as the Nazi attitude toward the Jews. There is a parallel between such phenomena and the primitive ritual, but the difference is even more important. It may be put thus: the primitive ritual, from what accounts we have of it, involves a conscious transference of guilt and responsibility to the scapegoat figure; the primitive, one imagines, knows that the figure is not really guilty to begin with. The modern man, however, who was told that all the problems of Germany were caused by the Jews often did, in fact, really believe it. The transference, in other words, was unconscious and therefore, it is possible to argue, more dangerous. In this respect, one must admit, primitive societies show far more cultural sophistication than some modern societies. They manage to contain within cultural forms impulses of hostility toward minorities and aliens. These impulses, precisely because they remain unconscious, create considerable havoc in modern society.

The distinction may be clarified in another way. Frank Kermode makes a distinction between 'myth' and 'fiction': a story or idea one really believes in would be a myth; if, however, it is given only a conditional assent or entertained as a hypothesis only, prefaced by an 'as if', then it is a fiction.[66] A fiction is a model of reality and not reality itself. I imagine that myth and fiction in this usage would be associated with primitive and sophisticated attitudes respectively, but as it turns out, the real situation is precisely the opposite. It is the primitive who shows the more sophisticated attitude in taking the scapegoat figure only as a fiction, a make-believe, however efficacious and potent, and it is the modern man who has shown himself to be prone to mythical literalness.

Coming back to Shakespeare, it is important, I think, to make a distinction between the two senses of the term scapegoat that I have been just describing. Now, it seems to me that this distinction is obscured in

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[66] See p. 65 above.

the criticism of the plays that we have examined. Is Shylock, we might ask, a scapegoat because guilt and responsibility is transferred onto him unconsciously? If so, whose guilt? Is Shakespeare presenting in his play the mechanism by which guilt is transferred onto an alien figure by the Venetians? There seems little evidence that Shakespeare shows an awareness that the Venetians are unconsciously making of Shylock a scapegoat. The play is not a study in social prejudice as, it is possible to argue, Othello is. But in Othello the scapegoat theme is not so evident. To be prejudiced is not necessarily to make of the object of prejudice a scapegoat. But if Shakespeare is not studying in the play the mechanism of 'vicarious victimage', to use Kenneth Burke's phrase, is it the case that he himself, and his audience, are the ones that are making of Shylock a scapegoat, unconsciously? Can one say that Shakespeare, in purging Shylock, is purging himself and his audience of possible guilt associated with their attitude towards money? Because of Shylock's sacrifice, as it were, Shakespeare and his audience are able to make peace between their conscience and their love of money. But these psychological hypotheses about unconscious projections lead us far away from the usual kind of myth and ritual criticism. The limits of such criticism are, I suggest, the tracing of analogies within the plays with actual rituals. In the possible applications of the concept of scapegoat that I have just suggested this is not so. There the concept is extended to include the creative process and the relation between the artist, the audience, and the work. Perhaps it is arbitrary to talk of the limits of the ritual approach, but I do want to suggest that in the use of the concept of the scapegoat necessary distinctions are often overlooked, and an anthropological concept confused with a psychological one. This is not to say that the one cannot be extended to the other; but it is to maintain that the one should not be confused with the other.

In Barber's discussion of the expulsion of Falstaff I find a similar confusion. Barber does, in fact, suggest that in the play the 'magical' expulsion of Falstaff is to be taken as Shakespeare's private

ritual rather than just Hal's.[67] It is this magical engineering of the coup against Falstaff that constitutes, in Barber's view, the chief failure of II Henry IV. But one could argue that the failure (if it is that) is due to precisely the opposite reason. The scene represents a failure because it is not like a public ritual of scapegoat riddance, but rather a private ritual given the form of a rational act done for reasons of state. The scene is not, to put the matter slightly differently, a ritual within the play, but only so if we take the whole relational network (artist-work-audience) into account. Within the play it is merely a scene of expulsion. There are hardly any suggestions in it of ritual purgation of the kind that we may discern in, for example, the killing of Macbeth, a killing which restores the fertility of the land.

This linking of fertility with the sacrifice of the scapegoat points to yet another motif in the scapegoat concept. According to Frazer, the divine king is killed in the prime of his life so that his vitality may be transmitted to the whole land. This is a different thing from the periodic expulsion of the scapegoat who merely carries away the guilt of the community with him into exile or death. Frazer himself, of course, suggests that these two types of ceremonies might originally have been different but combined at a later stage for the sake of convenience. It might also be the case that both types of ritual are associated with the concern for the regeneration of the community. But whatever the similarities from the anthropological point of view, from the point of view of literary criticism the differences between the two rituals seem to outweigh the similarities. I have pointed out in connexion with Falstaff that he is discussed as a scapegoat in both senses : as a spirit of vitality sacrificed precisely because he stands for vitality (as in sacrifices of animals like the bull) and also as the scapegoat who carries away the guilt of the community on his shoulders. I am not sure that these two kinds of sacrifice can be equated. Romeo and Juliet, one could argue,

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[67] Barber, p. 219. One might remark here that in a sense a private ritual is a contradiction in terms.

are sacrifices in the first sense -- the mingling of their blood in sacrifice would bring about the atonement of the two communities. They are sacrificed not because they are guilty but because precisely the opposite is the case. Their sacrifice, moreover, is seen as a sacrifice within the play. But clearly it makes little sense to speak of Macbeth as the same kind of sacrificial victim as Romeo and Juliet or Hamlet. Within the play he is like the scapegoat in that he is linked to the sterility of the land and must be sacrificed if the country is to be fertile once more. But that is a very different kind of sacrifice from that of Romeo and Juliet.

Like Macbeth, Coriolanus and Richard III are also associated with disorder in their lands, and their deaths are also meant to restore the order. In this sense they are scapegoat figures. However, in none of these cases is the idea of 'vicarious victimage' explicit. There is a hint of their special status (which the scapegoat must have -- he is supposed to be divine as well as taboo) in the way each of them is associated with something abnormal or supernatural. For example, Macbeth cannot be killed by anyone who was born normally; Richard III is said to have had an abnormal birth; and Coriolanus -- straining the point a little -- an abnormal childhood. But all these remain rather irrelevant traits as far as their executions are concerned since the rationalizations for killing them are so convincing as to draw attention away altogether from their scapegoat function. Thus we can say that although they retain some of the attributes of the primitive scapegoat, these figures are given roles which are predominantly naturalistic. Their expulsion or execution, like the expulsion of Falstaff, Malvolio, and Shylock, is wholly explicable in terms of their actual guilt or recalcitrance.

In the light of the foregoing, therefore, I would like to qualify the verdict of Robert Hapgood on the concept of the scapegoat. Mr. Hapgood writes : 'The association -- not equation -- of the death of the tragic hero with the sacrifice of the scapegoat king seems to me easily the soundest and most suggestive contribution which ritualists

have made to date.'[68] While agreeing with him about the suggestiveness of the concept, I would also like to emphasize its vagueness, especially as used in the routine kind of ritual criticism, that is, the kind of criticism which consists in drawing analogies between specific primitive rituals or types of rituals and works of art. The concept is vague because, first, the distinction between the psychological and the anthropological sense is often confused, and secondly, the distinctions between the very different kinds of ritual that go under the name of scapegoat rituals are also often not taken sufficiently into account.

The use of the concept in a more functional and psychological sense seems to me to be more useful and certainly more promising. I am thinking here primarily of Kenneth Burke, in whose critical theory the figure of the scapegoat is very prominent, but in a psychological-cum-sociological sense. In using the concept one must clarify, I suggest, whether the figure is a scapegoat within the play or in relation to the context of the artist's life and society. One must also clarify what evils are being transferred onto the scapegoat or what tensions, social or psychological, are being purged through him. This would involve a kind of depth-analysis very different from the normal discerning of the ritual pattern below the level of plot and character.

Examples of the second way in which the concept of ritual features in criticism of Shakespeare may be seen in the works of critics like Francis Fergusson, C. L. Barber, Robert Hapgood, and others, who are concerned with examining the place of ritual within a play as a whole. This kind of criticism is usually extended to the discussion of the rival attitudes of the major characters towards life as reflected in their attitudes towards ritual, especially the rituals of kingship. The consensus of opinion among such critics is that Shakespeare's drama presents a period of transition from a ritualistic (that is, involving belief in the practical efficacy of

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[68] Hapgood, 'Shakespeare and the Ritualists', p. 120.

rites -- hence, more generally, mythico-religious) to a pragmatic-utilitarian attitude. In Shakespeare's drama the scepticism is as marked as the more primitive belief in ritual, and critics tend to emphasize one or the other depending on their own predilections. Fergusson, for example, while admitting that in Hamlet the ritual of kingship is shown to be ineffective, argues, nevertheless, that this does not imply a loss of faith in ritual as such. Robert Heilman and Philip Wheelwright also feel that although, in Heilman's phrase, the plays generally present 'myth in crisis', the sympathies of Shakespeare lie with the mythical-religious-ritualistic world-view.

To consider the plays as rituals, which is the other way in which the concept of ritual as ritual enters the criticism of the plays, is to argue for the persistence of belief in ritual, but in a very modified sense. It is the play as a whole which is now considered to provide the efficacy of ritual, not for characters within the plays however, but for the audience and the society at large. This efficacy is not, of course, to be understood in a very material sense. As Holloway puts it, it is a matter of giving the audience a sense of power and of belonging to a community. The Aristotelian theory of catharsis can also be invoked to explain the efficacy of tragedy, or drama generally, as ritual. Kenneth Burke, in fact, does precisely this.

It can, then, be said that drama as ritual reverses the process by which, according to the theory of Jane Harrison and Ernst Cassirer, drama and art generally evolved from the magico-religious matrix. According to Jane Harrison, it will be remembered, drama arose from dromena when the latter was emancipated from practical ends. In contemporary theatrical theory and practice, however, it is precisely this psychic distance that is being sought to be removed. Richard Schechner writes that 'the ambition to make theatre into ritual is nothing other than a wish to make performance efficacious, to use events to change people. Cassirer's analysis seems old-fashioned and Artaud's prophetic'.[69]

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[69] See p. 48 above.

Schechner is speaking of direct political ends of drama, but even when defined in a more psychological sense, the theory of drama as ritual is a theory which attempts to relate drama to other forms of cultural activity rather than to isolate it. As such, I find it an attractive theory. Nevertheless, some qualifications must be made about Holloway's formulation of the theory.

Holloway attempts to bring his anthropology up-to-date by suggesting that after Malinowski and others, myths are no longer thought of as embodiments of truth or expressions of a peculiar mode of thought, but rather as dynamic elements within their culture. The important thing about myth is that it performs an important social function. On this analogy literature too, according to Holloway, may be said to have a function to perform rather than a truth to convey. Similarly a great work of art may be compared to a ritual, which also has a social function to perform. The difference between myth and ritual is said to be analogous to the difference between the story of Lear and the play King Lear.[70] I think that Holloway is right to insist on the social function of myth and ritual. But the corollary of that view would be to insist on the social function of literature. In order to determine that it would be necessary to place the work of art in its historical setting; just as the meaning of myth or ritual can be understood only in the context of their particular societies, so also the work of art can be understood properly only when seen in its social context. Mr. Holloway is no doubt aware of this implication of the extension to literature of the anthropological theory of myth, and he is also aware that a work of art, unlike myth, can sometimes be a subversive force. (So can myth, actually, if we follow Sorel's use of the term.) But whether the work of art is subversive or conservative can only be decided with reference to its social coordinates, either of the society of its origin, or the reader's own. But Mr. Holloway, it seems to me, takes a very non-historical view of society; he is concerned not with particular societies as with society as such. The

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[70] Holloway, pp. 176-7.

distinction is very clearly brought out when we compare his criticism with, say, the criticism of Kenneth Burke. The comparison is appropriate because Burke too is concerned with the function of drama-as-ritual.

In the paragraph above I have been referring to the social function of both myth and ritual, but the distinction between them is perhaps even more important from the specifically literary point of view. Leaving aside the question of the priority of either myth or ritual, it is generally agreed that although myth has a social function, that function is operative only through its enactment or recitation in ritual. Anthropologists have shown how the recitation of myth is an important communal occasion. Similarly, Elizabethan drama has been seen by several critics as providing for its contemporary society what would normally be provided by ritual in more simple societies. (Consider, for example, Francis Fergusson's remarks on the ritual function of the drama in Elizabethan culture in his discussion of Hamlet, or the comments of Maynard Mack and Douglas Hewitt on King Lear.) This was so, one might argue, because the drama, through its reenactments of the 'myths' of the age (the 'Tudor myth', the fear of rebellion, the belief in the 'magical' connexion between the king and the country, or in the supremacy of law and order, to take some random examples) brought these myths within the focus of the collective consciousness and gave them functional potency. (We see here a connexion between the idea of ritual as giving power to myth and the idea propagated by F. R. Leavis that literature is an enactment of values. The equation I am suggesting is: ritual : myth = the particular work of literature : values.)

If the point about the ritual function of Elizabethan drama is accepted, then we can see another way in which Shakespeare's drama represents the failure of ritual. In some way, Shakespeare's drama presents the most powerful celebration of the values of order and kingship, as G. Wilson Knight has pointed out. Shakespeare's drama-as-ritual does not merely derive its power from these ideas; it rather

imparts power to them. But the efficacy of this ritual celebration of order and kingship was not to last long. The anxieties that lay behind them were soon to be proved to have been well-founded. Within less than thirty years of Shakespeare's death the Civil War broke out. That represents the failure not of the rituals of Shakespeare's dramatic characters, but rather of the ritual drama of Shakespeare himself. In the vaster context of the historical process Shakespeare's drama (if we are to insist on describing them as rituals) represents as pathetic a failure of the efficacy of ritual as the rituals, say, of Richard II. On the other hand, if we are to take the plays, especially the histories, as dealing consciously with the failure of ritual, then, one can say, history merely vindicated Shakespeare's insight and imitated his drama.

CHAPTER 8

SHAKESPEARE'S MYTHICAL THOUGHT AND VISION

In this chapter I shall document those studies of the plays and poems of Shakespeare which are concerned with their mythical aspects, mythical being understood to refer to a special mode of thought, as discussed in Chapter 3. As we saw there, a wide diversity of phenomena was included by Cassirer under the category of mythical thought, and following his example, I shall include all discussions of the 'primitive or 'magical' aspects of the works in this chapter. For our purpose these terms (mythical, primitive, magical) are to be taken as synonymous. Although the idea of myth has been very influential in twentieth-century critical theory, combining as it does the Romantic theory of the symbol with ideas derived from the study of primitive societies and primitive ways of thought, it has not had proportionate influence on the criticism of individual works, and that includes the works of Shakespeare. The most frequent way in which the concept of myth has featured in criticism of Shakespeare is that which I have documented in Chapter 6. A sizeable proportion of studies applying the 'ritual' approach can also, as I have suggested, be included within the category of allegorical-cum-typological criticism since in such studies the emphasis is on the meaning of the ritual that is discovered beneath the surface action of the play. There are relatively few studies which seek to apply the concept of a special mythical mode of thought to the plays and poems. I shall therefore abandon the plan of the play-by-play survey of the criticism that I have followed in the two previous chapters and discuss those general aspects of Shakespeare's works which, in the light of the discussion in Chapter 3, may be, or have been, described as 'primitive' or 'magical' or 'mythical'.

In his book Literature and the Irrational (1960) Wayne Shumaker undertakes a thorough study of the ways in which anthropological concepts and the study of primitive societies can have application in literature. The general conclusion he arrives at is that like primitive language and modes of thought literature is also primarily irrational and affective rather than rational and cognitive. One of the epigraphs to his book is the statement of Cassirer's: 'Primarily language does not express thoughts or ideas, but feelings and affections.' Most of the book is concerned with demonstrating this by showing the similarities between literature and aspects of primitive languages and modes of thought and behaviour as studied by anthropologists. As I have suggested in Chapter 3, which is the theoretical counterpart of this chapter, one can never be sure whether this similarity is objectively there or a result of applying a certain theoretical model to the phenomena of primitive language and speech, a model derived from the Romantic theory of the symbol rather than from empirical observation of primitive peoples.[1] This seems to be borne out by the fact that recent anthropological theory has cast doubts on the idea of a primitive mode of thought, and in any case it tends to define this mode of thought in a very different manner. Thus, Lévi-Strauss does speak of 'the savage mind', but his purpose is to try to indicate how the working of such a mind is similar to rational thinking in many ways. Kenneth Burke in his very different manner has also been concerned with the similarities between mythical or primitive thought and contemporary ways of thought and behaviour. Burke, it is true, does not deal with the question with the scientific rigour of Lévi-Strauss, but both of them are concerned with primitive thought as an instance of symbolic systems in general.

However, Mr. Shumaker's book remains the only one which makes extensive use of anthropological theories and observations to throw light on certain well-known aspects of literary language and form, even though some of these theories would be questioned by many

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[1] See pp. 68-71 above.

contemporary anthropologists. To mention some examples: he draws a parallel between the primitive habit of intense absorption in something that catches the attention and the absorption in the work of art that the reader or spectator is supposed to experience. Certain stylistic features are also related to primitive linguistic habits. Thus, for example, both primitive and literary language are held to be 'concrete' and 'tending to register percepts in Gestalten'; both mythical thought and literature show the presence of irrational conjunctions between elements on the basis of mere contiguity, an evidence of this being the frequency of parataxis in them (as also in the speech of children). The principle of pars pro toto is similarly common to primitive thought and literary language, manifesting itself in the latter in the figure of synecdoche. Primitive animism can also be seen reflected in literary language, largely in the form of dead metaphors revived, personifications, and the pathetic fallacy. Mr. Shumaker also traces the origins of the major literary forms like tragedy, comedy, the epic, and the lyric to primitive rituals and ways of thought. In another book he applies some of these ideas to the language and form of Paradise Lost to show how that poem may be considered as a myth.[2] Unfortunately, Mr. Shumaker has not discussed the mythical aspects of Shakespeare in this sense, but it is not very difficult to imagine the way this could be done. To do so, however, is beyond my brief, which is to document actual applications and not possible ones. There is however one aspect of Shakespeare's thought that is so obviously 'mythical' that I would like to mention it here as an instance of 'myth criticism', even though the concept of myth is not explicitly invoked.

I am referring to what Tillyard has called the 'Elizabethan world picture' and which he sees reflected in the plays, especially in the histories. Many elements of this world picture are obviously mythical in the sense we have discussed in Chapter 3. Cassirer, it will be remembered, included such phenomena as alchemy within the category

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[2] See the ch. 'Paradise Lost as Myth' in Unpremeditated Verse: Feeling and Perception in 'Paradise Lost', (Princeton, 1967).

of mythical thought, and alchemy draws upon beliefs which are common to the Elizabethan world picture. What is more interesting from our point of view is that aspect of this picture which Tillyard describes as 'the corresponding planes'. These planes were conceived of as 'arranged one below another in order of dignity but connected by an immense net of correspondences'. As examples of such correspondence, Tillyard mentions the obvious ones between the microcosm and the macrocosm, and between the macrocosm and the commonwealth that features in Ulysses's famous speech on 'degree' in Troilus and Cressida.[3] The causal linking, in this speech, of the violation of degree in different spheres is an obvious example of 'magical' causation rather than a scientific one. The function of what Cassirer calls 'the law of concrescence or coincidence of the members of a relation in mythical thinking'can be very readily observed in this and other similar passages.[4] Indeed this aspect of Shakespeare's thought has been especially emphasized in twentieth-century criticism of the plays and there is little need, I think, to labour the point. It may not be an exaggeration to say that Shakespeare's universe (much more emphatically than that of the other dramatists of the period) is a magical universe, where each significant act is seen as magically affecting the whole structure. In the description of regicide, in particular, this transformation of analogical relationships into apparently causal ones is most evident.

The magical relationship between the Shakespearean king and his kingdom has been observed by several critics, though not always in specifically anthropological terms. One aspect of this relationship may be seen in the theme of the sacrifice of the tragic hero (though here the redemption of the community may be seen as a result of contagious or metonymic, rather than analogical or imitative, causation). Shakespeare's kings, generally speaking, are charged with mana. The well-being of their community is linked to their own well-being, so that if they are

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[3] Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 77.

[4] See p. 57 above.

impure, their impurity is shown as blighting the whole land. This phenomenon is specially well-marked in Macbeth, where Macbeth's violation of the taboo on regicide brings down a curse of sterility on the whole of Scotland. G. Wilson Knight has been one of the most important critics in this century to have brought out the significance of Shakespeare's 'royalism', the central place that the mystique or myth of kingship occupies in his drama.

This belief in the magical role of kingship is related to another marked feature of Shakespeare's plays, especially Macbeth and Lear. In Shakespeare, regicide (and its familial counterpart in crimes against fathers or brothers) is always more than a mere violation of legal and ethical codes: it seems to implicate the whole universe. One of the reasons for dissatisfaction with Bradley's kind of character analysis may be precisely this sense of the vast cosmic implications of 'unnatural' crimes that psychological study of character tends to ignore. No other poet of the period seems to have given such frequent and such powerful expression to the sense of the magical relatedness of things. Using metaphors and similes from nature to described human feelings and affairs is, of course, to be found in the poetry of every period, but in Shakespeare such comparisons seem to be more than mere comparisons. They seem, rather, to evoke the primitive sense of identity between man and nature.

Another feature of this belief in the relatedness of things as it is present in Shakespeare may be noted before I go on to discuss some other aspects of his mythical mode of thought. The belief seems to transcend ordinary religious and moral codes. The Great Chain of Being may, indeed, be quite compatible with Christianity, but as it features in the plays, it is related to a much more primitive way of thinking. As M. M. Badawi (1960) puts it, with reference to Macbeth,

> Shakespeare seems to go beyond what is specifically religious. His imaginative conception of the murder (and of the experience of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth) is so profound that what we feel about the crime is not just the usual horror at

> the breaking of the second commandment, but the more mysterious and terrifying horror at the violation of a primitive taboo. The result is that the primitive man that lurks deep in our being is touched while we are reading or watching it.

Badawi goes on to point out some of the magical or primitive elements in the play, such as the disease of the land (as in Oedipus) consequent upon the taboo action, the healing touch of Edward, the near sanctification of Duncan, the ceremonial act of purification of the land by the forces of Malcolm, and its futile counterpart at the individual level in the 'obsessive act of compulsion neurosis' in Lady Macbeth's washing of her hands.[5] Earlier, J.I.M. Stewart (1949) had also commented on the primitivism of the play. Stewart compares Macbeth's crime to the cannibalistic eating of flesh. 'Nor,' he writes, 'is the parallel so outlandish as it may appear. For it is veritably the crime and not the crown that compels Macbeth, as it is the virtue that lies in the terrible and forbidden, and not the flavour of the human flesh, that compels the savage.'[6] In the two previous chapters I have commented on the peculiar fascination of this play, in which a considerable degree of psychological verisimilitude is combined with mythical and ritual elements; it now seems that the play is also primitive from the point of view of the mode of thinking that it reflects.

It is not only in the relatedness between the king and his community that the magical belief in causal relations between analogical elements is manifested. It can be observed in its more general aspect as a belief in the organic relatedness of the individual, nature, and society in the comedies and the romances. This is very clearly seen in The Winter's Tale. The seasonal myths that have been discerned not only in this play but in the comedies and tragedies as well are also an aspect of this magical relatedness of things, although much of the

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[5] Badawi, 'Euphemism and Circumlocution in Macbeth', pp. 43-5.

[6] Character and Motive in Shakespeare, pp. 93-4.

criticism surveyed in Chapter 6 merely described the analogy between the human and the natural without implying a causal connexion between them.

The concept of magical causality has also been applied to explain the effect of the double plot in the plays. William Empson suggests in Some Versions of Pastoral (1935) that the double plot convention depends for its effect on certain magical ideas, a point which has been taken up by Angus Fletcher (1964) and Richard Levin (1971). Empson develops the idea in the course of a discussion of the double plot in Elizabethan drama, more immediately, of the double plot in Troilus and Cressida. Empson writes:

> The two parts make a mutual comparison that illuminates both parties ('love and war are alike') and their large-scale indefinite juxtaposition seems to encourage primitive ways of thought ('Cressida will bring Troy badluck because she is bad'). This power of suggestion is the strength of the double plot; once you take the two parts to correspond, any character may take on mana because he seems to cause what he corresponds to or be Logos of what he symbolizes.[7]

Richard Levin (1971) carries forward this suggestion in his analysis of the function of the multiple plot in Renaissance drama. He points out that in this play the love and war themes are causally related since the sexual motivation lies behind most of the fighting. Thus, for example, even Achilles's savage assault on Hector is in part related to his love for Patroclus. There is, however, according to Levin, a different kind of causation also at work in the relation of the two plots. This, he suggests, is a magical causation as distinguished from the literal kind of causation just mentioned. As a result of this magical causation, not only is war seen as the result of love, but the outcome of the war plot is felt to be dependent upon the outcome of the love plot. This is precisely the opposite of the surface plot, in which the lovers are separated by the

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[7] Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, p. 34. See also Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode, Ch. 4, 'Allegorical Causation: Magic and Ritual Forms'.

exigencies of war. But according to the causal law of magic, that is, the law of post hoc, ergo propter hoc, one tends to feel, not merely that Troy is defeated because Cressida is bad, as Empson argues, but also that

> Troy's original military advantage was related to Paris's amatory triumph over Menelaus, who as a scorned cuckold brings bad luck to the Greek side, so that with Troilus's defeat this advantage is lost. The Trojan "love" hero has been cuckolded by a Greek in one arena, and the magical consequence is that the Trojan "war" hero is killed by a Greek in the other arena, and that Troy will succumb to the invaders.[8]

Mr. Levin also discusses the magical function of the clown subplot in Henry IV. This magical function is described in general terms as the providing of vicarious pleasure to the reader or spectator through the clown's indulgence in infantile or primitive desires. The clown also acts as a 'lightning rod' to disarm parodic impulses against the heroic protagonist. His mockery, like ritual cursings or the rituals of rebellion observed in some primitive societies, provides a safe outlet for impulses hostile to order in the community. I have already referred to C. L. Barber's discussion of Falstaff's role as the mock king of the saturnalia. The festive connexion of the clown subplots (Falstaff is considered as a clown) is, in fact, implicit in their very nature, as Mr. Levin rightly points out, since their 'alternating episodes were shown to offer a kind of emotional vacation from the more serious business of the main action'. Shakespeare, however, according to Mr. Levin (following C. L. Barber), deliberately emphasizes the saturnalian role of Falstaff, and this has the consequence that Falstaff's 'magical function of providing a licensed release for the drives and fantasies of childhood' applies not only to the audience but also to Prince Hal.[9]

The scapegoat function of the tragic hero is also, of course,

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[8]Levin, The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama, pp. 160-8, esp. p. 167.

[9]Ibid., pp. 141-4.

an example of the mythical mode of thought, as is the belief in the magical efficacy of ritual. Both these aspects of mythical thought have already been discussed in the previous chapter. As I tried to show there, opinion about Shakespeare's attitude to ritual is divided. According to some critics Shakespeare is concerned to show the inadequacy of mere dependence upon ritual. In terms of our concern in this chapter this could be taken to mean that Shakespeare, far from expressing a primitive or magical mode of thought, rather presents that mode of thought within a critical, non-mythic perspective. On the other hand, the presence of the ritual patterns that have been discerned in the plays, especially the ritual of the scapegoat, would imply that his own way of thinking is closer to the mythic mode than the rational or scientific. This question of the mode of thought is very easily confused with the question of the content of thought, that is, with the question of belief, and the idea of myth frequently appears in discussions of the nature of Shakespeare's beliefs as expressed in the plays and poems. I shall come to this point shortly, but before that I would like to mention a few other ways in which the mythical or magical mode of thought has been seen manifested in the works.

The primitive quality of Macbeth has been remarked upon by several critics, some of whom I have already mentioned. In the article already referred to, M. M. Badawi also comments on a peculiar stylistic feature of the play and links it to a belief in word-magic. This feature is the use of euphemisms and indirections by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to refer to the murder of Duncan (such as the use of the pronoun or of more general nouns like 'deed'). The witches also refer to the murder as 'a deed without a name'. This reluctance to name a terrible thing, which is the real feeling behind euphemisms and circumlocutions, reveals, according to Badawi, what Otto Jespersen has described as an 'ingrained fear of the right word, a belief, that is, in the more or less supernatural power immanent in the word itself'. It is this power of the word which witchcraft tries to exploit, and it is essentially a product of the primitive habit of mind. Language in this play has a mysterious

role; one feels that the nocturnal atmosphere is a result of the prayers (i.e., words) of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The words in this play, as Badawi puts it, 'seem to acquire an independent existence and reality that terrify the characters; they haunt them and keep on reverberating and echoing in their minds'.[10]

D. F. Rauber (1969) comments on the importance of threeness in the play, pointing out, for example, how the structure of the play seems to be divisible into three parts, however we choose to describe this structure. Thus, the play could be seen as depicting the three-part action of Macbeth's rise, kingship, and fall, or the progress from Duncan's benign rule, through Macbeth's tyranny, to the restoration of peace. The play could also be divided into three realms of metaphorical space: heaven (symbolized by the pious Edward), hell (the witches), and between them, earth (Scotland bleeding under the tyrant's rule). In terms of the relations between characters also the three-part structure can be discerned. Thus, in the first part of the play, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, young and 'strong in their fertile youth, kill the old king-father in classic mythic fashion'; the second part of the play corresponds to the middle age of the protagonists, and Macbeth here kills the middle-aged Banquo; in the third part, the old and sterile Macbeth kills the young Lady Macduff and her son and attempts to kill the young and vigorous Macduff. Interestingly enough, at first there is an attempt to kill one person and that succeeds; in the second stage, there is an attempt to kill two (Banquo and Fleance) but only one is killed; in the third stage the attempt is to kill three (Macduff and his family) but only two are killed. Thus Rauber goes on in an interesting and amusing manner to trace other triadic patterns in the play. These patterns, he suggests, are linked to the 'extensive use of the traditional incantatory and mystical power of this potent number', and indeed in the play the number also appears in its incantatory function in the speeches of the witches who are, of course, three in number. As another confirmation of his analysis, Rauber points to the otherwise arbitrary introduction of the third

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[10]Badawi, pp. 42-3.

murderer.[11]

This kind of analysis would inevitably lead to numerological analysis. Indeed there is a numerological exegesis of Venus and Adonis,[12] but such studies are (mercifully perhaps) not very common. I imagine they do point to a belief in Shakespeare's time in the magical value of important numbers. Perhaps, even more importantly, they point to our own interest in primitive and irrational modes of thought. In Macbeth certainly the number three does appear in a magical context in the witches' speeches, and the fact that threeness seems to extend even to the structure of the play may well indicate a residual belief in the magical efficacy of numbers.

Finally, on this subject of the magical value of words and numbers in Shakespeare, I would like to suggest that the well-known feature of Shakespeare's style, his often tedious play upon words, may also be, though only remotely, connected with this belief in the magical value of words. I say remotely because usually the play upon words has the quality of play rather than ritual incantation about it. The delight in words is a marked feature of children's behaviour; they seem to play with them as with toys. Play, of course, is not ritual, but 'the omnipotence of thought' operates in both, and in any case both play upon words and ritual incantation of them assume the thinginess, as it were, of words. The parallel between the two seems to be closer when we consider that the characteristic form of play on words in Shakespeare's drama is the wit-combat, a combat, that is, in which words take the place of swords and lances or of the counters in a game of chess. Compare, for example, the play on the word 'hit' during the wit-combat in Love's Labour's Lost (IV.1.100) with the use of the same word during the duel in Hamlet ('A hit, a very palpable hit', V.2.273). Even if one

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[11] 'Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth', esp. p. 60.

[12] See Christopher Butler and Alastair Fowler, 'Time Beguiling Sport: Number Symbolism in Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis'.

were to deny the ritual function of such usage of words, it would, I think, be readily granted that this play upon words is an instance of a primitive (and infantile) habit of thought, in which words are given a sort of material status. I suspect, however, that the puns and verbal juggleries in the plays link up, in obscure ways, with such things as ritual exorcism of evil through cursing, riddles, catechisms, poetic contests, and incantations, the common element in all these phenomena being the belief in the material reality of words. This therefore, considering the fact that not the least important aspect of Shakespeare's greatness is his verbal felicity, ought to be considered as one of the more important aspects of his primitive or mythical habit of thought.

So far I have discussed the 'mythical' aspects of the plays with reference to the formal laws of the mythical or primitive mode of thought as studied by Cassirer and others (e.g., pars pro toto, concreteness, hypostatization, and so on). Used thus, the term mythical is relatively value-free. But myth is more often a value-laden term, like the Romantic symbol, and implies a superior mode of apprehending reality. But the interest of the writers who use myth in this sense (I have in mind people like Paul Tillich, Philip Wheelwright, G. Wilson Knight, Robert Heilman, Richmond Hathorn) seems to be not so much in the form of mythical thought as in its content. And it seems to me that it is the high value placed on this content that makes them value myth or the mythical mode of thought so much. The mythical and the scientific modes of thought are once again contrasted, not with respect to their respective laws, however, but rather in terms of the nature of the different kinds of reality that these modes of thought are related to. In the 'mythico-religious' dimension, to use Philip Wheelwright's phrase, there is an awareness of transcendental forces lurking behind everyday reality.[13] And the very term 'transcendental' implies that this reality is beyond the ken of scientific or rational enquiry. Myth has thus become a useful

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[13] Wheelwright, 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', p. 11.

term in the debate about science and poetry. The matter is put very succinctly by Robert B. Heilman (1948). Referring to a symposium on 'Myth in the Later Plays of Shakespeare' he writes:

> Our own symposium is, I suppose, an effort to modify the kind of enlightenment that has led to an over-extension of the mythoclastic habit of mind [mythoclastic = positivist]. Ernst Cassirer describes myth as pre-logical; we are now coming to know that it is also post-logical or, better perhaps, co-logical.[14]

The difference between Cassirer's phenomenological approach to the mythical consciousness and this more 'ontological' approach is very evident. In some sense, it is felt, 'reality' can be grasped only through myth. And as this reality is conceived of as of a higher kind than scientific reality, the mythical mode of thought is also granted a higher status than the scientific (cf. 'post-logical'; Heilman's qualification in the following phrase is merely a rhetorical concession).

Heilman goes on to discuss the mythical aspect of Shakespeare's plays in terms of his definition of myth. He suggests that Shakespeare's later plays are mythic in two senses: they draw upon 'vital myths' and they are themselves 'mythic'. This is brought out clearly if one asks the questions: 'What myths were available to Shakespeare, and what is the Shakespeare myth?' Heilman's purpose in this essay is to answer these two questions. The myths available to Shakespeare, according to him, were the myth of Christianity, the myth of 'love and justice' (the phrase is William Troy's) and the 'myth of love and the myth of divine and earthly governance' (Philip Wheelwright's phrase).

Shakespeare's plays are themselves mythic according to the Longinian test of appeal to prosperity and, more importantly, by the kind of appeal to posterity, namely, 'the ability to create in posterity a sense of being made to see into the universal. We do not confront Shakespeare with logical dispute: we explicate him'. The plays are also mythic because in them there is a 'residuum of mystery'. Heilman then goes on to

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[14] Heilman, 'The Lear World', pp. 34-5.

argue that Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Macbeth, all show Shakespeare's concern with 'myth in crisis'. In fact Lear, according to Heilman, is a 'myth about myth'.[15] Heilman has elaborated the reading of Lear and Othello in separate book-length studies. I do not find his use of the term myth very enlightening because many other terms would have done as well. Maybe Lear is about myth in crisis, but myth here means no more than traditional beliefs -- and not merely traditional beliefs but beliefs which Mr. Heilman clearly finds very attractive. He is, in other words, more concerned with the 'ideology' implicit in the myths than in the myths themselves. Besides, if one describes a play as depicting 'myth in crisis', it becomes confusing to describe the same play as also mythic. But I imagine one could argue that many myths (including Shakespeare's) are concerned to show how wicked it is to challenge established values (or myths) and are in this sense concerned with myth in crisis.

Shakespeare's plays are described as mythic not merely because they imply a belief in transcendental reality, but also because they employ non-naturalistic devices to hint at this reality. Thus Maynard Mack suggests that Lear is mythic because 'it abandons verisimilitude to find out truth'. The play is not, however, to be taken as an allegory; it is symbolic rather than allegorical. Professor Mack writes: 'Though there is much of the Morality play [i.e., allegory] in Lear, it is not used toward a morality theme, but . . . toward building a deeply metaphysical metaphor, or myth, [he might have also said 'symbol'] about the human condition.'[16] The model for this usage of the term 'myth' is, I think, the Platonic myth rather than the myths of primitive societies. Just as Plato abandons logical discourse in his attempt to describe transcendental reality, so also, it is thought, Shakespeare has recourse to myth to express his intuitions of such a

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[15] Ibid., pp. 36-41, 45.

[16] 'King Lear' in Our Time, pp. 97, 115.

reality. This is the argument put forward by G. Wilson Knight, especially in connexion with the 'miraculous' scenes in the romances, and by Richmond Hathorn in his discussion of Hamlet and Lear. A large number of the studies documented in Chapter 6 would also fall under this category, and indeed I have mentioned Knight and Hathorn earlier. I mention these studies again here only because they insist that these truths are not expressed allegorically but symbolically, which would seem to imply that they can be apprehended only through the mythical consciousness, not the rational. In practice, however, such studies are really a kind of allegorical exegesis because the emphasis in them is on the content of the mythical consciousness (the transcendental truths, the myths of love and divine government, immortality, and so on) than on the form. Exegesis of the mythical work inevitably becomes allegorizing of it, as I tried to argue in the first chapter. D. G. James puts the dilemma of the critic very well. He writes:

> The purpose of myth is the showing forth of that which cannot be set out by the representation of a merely human situation; its function is the conveyance, to whatever degree possible, of the divine as well as the human. Yet it is the case that to try to extract its significances, and to convey them in the prose of statement, is at once a desecration of the work of art, and, in any case, an impossibility; for the justification of the work of art is that it is only thus that an adequate conveyance of the writer's mind can be made.
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> Nevertheless, we are under compulsion to attempt judgment on the adequacy of myth to its purpose and significance; and if it be said that to do so is to carry out desecration and to attempt the impossible, the only reply must be that we cannot help ourselves. The critic can no more avoid trying to explicate and draw out the significances of Shakespeare's last plays than the theologian can help seeking to draw a philosophical theology out of the structure of Christian dogma.[17]

This is the dilemma which confronts most of the critics who discuss Shakespeare's plays as mythical: they assert that the plays present a

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[17] Scepticism and Poetry, pp. 213-14.

reality which can be apprehended only through the mythical consciousness, even while trying to express this reality in their own discursive prose. In contrast, the analysis of the mythical mode of thought in the light of the ideas of Cassirer and others does not involve allegorical exegesis, since in such works the emphasis is on the form of the mythical consciousness rather than on the content. I find this a more interesting approach than the reverential one of Wheelwright and others, though at the same time it ought to be pointed out that the idea of a special mythic mode of thought would receive, at best, very qualified assent from contemporary anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss.

CHAPTER 9

MYTH AS STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLE IN SHAKESPEARE

In this chapter I shall be concerned primarily with the Shakespeare criticism of Northrop Frye. The ideas of Lévi-Strauss have not yet made their full impact on the practice of literary criticism, but there are a few studies of the plays which make use of his ideas and which I shall mention in due course.

But before going on to discuss the Shakespeare criticism of Northrop Frye, I would like to draw attention to the kind of criticism of the plays which implies or assumes that Shakespeare consciously uses myths in some plays to give them structural unity. Actually I have already mentioned some critics of this kind in Chapter 6 (see, for example, Harold Fisch on Antony and Cleopatra or Richard Knowles on As You Like It). It is, of course, very difficult to distinguish between a thematic use of myth and a structural one, and it is because of this that I have chosen to discuss critics like Fisch in the earlier chapter on allegorical criticism. Even Wigston argued that Shakespeare (or rather Bacon) was aware of the significance of the myths alluded to in the plays and that these myths have a more important function in the plays than as mere allusions. Some Christian critics also assume conscious use of biblical parallels for thematic and structural purposes, but they tend to emphasize the thematic purpose rather than the structural.

Here I would like to mention just one critic. In an article on The Two Gentlemen of Verona, William Godshalk argues that the play has a 'masterful structure', created through a strategic distribution of allusions to classical myths. Godshalk comments on the allusions to the myths of Hero and Leander, Phaethon, Orpheus, and Theseus and Ariadne.

All these myths imply a tragic outcome for the actions 'as the characters become partially or wholly identified with figures in the myths'. In this subtle way, according to Godshalk, 'Shakespeare builds up an almost subliminal sense of crisis, suspense and tension. The tragic innuendo is the chief function of the structure of mythological allusion'. Godshalk also discusses some other 'structures' in the play which reinforce this sense of tragic resolution.[1] However, it is doubtful, it seems to me, whether he would have discovered the tragic innuendoes in the allusions to the myths if the story itself did not suggest impending tragedy at certain moments. But I suppose one could argue that the mythic allusions are one of the subtle ways in which Shakespeare is able to manipulate the responses of his audience and create dramatic irony and suspense. And it may be right to describe such use of myths as structural.

I come now to the Shakespeare criticism of Northrop Frye. Frye has called himself an 'Odyssey' rather than an 'Iliad' critic, that is, he is more interested in comedy and romance than in tragedy and irony.[2] It is therefore not surprising to find that his book on the comedies and romances of Shakespeare is much more interesting than his book on the tragedies. It is to the former book, A Natural Perspective that I shall devote most of my attention.

Frye begins by observing that in the comedies and romances Shakespeare 'does not ask his audience to accept an illusion: he asks them to listen to the story'. This ability to listen to a story without asking too many questions is associated by Frye with a primitive response, though I think that such an uncritical response will be very hard to find among primitive peoples.[3] However, according to Frye, Shakespeare

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[1] 'The Structural Unity of Two Gentlemen of Verona', p. 169.

[2] A Natural Perspective, pp. 1-2.

[3] For an amusing and interesting account of a very critical reception given to the story of Hamlet by a tribal group in West Africa, see Laura Bohannan, 'Miching Mallecho, That Means Witchcraft', London Magazine, 1, No. 5 (June, 1954), 51-60.

manages to elicit this primitive response from his audience because 'he draws away from everything that is local or specialized in the drama of his day, and works toward uncovering a primeval dramatic structure that practically anything in the shape of a human audience can respond to'.[4] This involves a deliberate revival of the archaic and the obsolete, and a considerable part of the book is devoted to illustrating these archaic and obsolete elements in the comedies and romances. These archaic elements are things like motifs from folk tales, myths, and folk rituals, and in illustrating them Frye is doing the kind of thing that we have documented in Chapters 6 and 7. I shall give a few examples of the folk and mythic elements in the comedies and romances as seen by Frye.

I have already mentioned Frye's comments on A Comedy of Errors and Much Ado about Nothing in Chapter 6. Frye sees mythical motifs even in the so-called problem plays. The problem in All's Well that Ends Well, for example, is not, according to him, any 'Shavian social problem of how a woman gets her man', but rather the 'mythical problem of how Helena, like her ancestress Psyche, is going to solve her three impossible tasks: first of healing the sick king, then of presenting Bertram with a son of his own getting, and with his own ring, the talisman of recognition that, in All's Well as in Sakuntala, awakens his mind to reality'. W. W. Lawrence had much earlier made practically the same comments on the play. Similarly the problem in Measure for Measure, according to Frye, is 'how Isabella's chastity, always a magical force in romance, is going to rescue both the violated Julietta and the jilted Mariana as a result of being exposed to the solicitations of Angelo'. About Cymbeline Frye writes: 'But Cymbeline is not, to put it mildly, a historical play: it is pure folk tale, featuring a cruel stepmother with her loutish son, a calumniated maiden, lost princes brought up in a cave by a foster father, a ring of recognition that works in reverse, villains displaying false trophies of adultery and

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[4] A Natural Perspective, pp. 12-13, 53, 58.

faithful servants displaying equally false trophies of murder, along with a great firework display of dreams, prophecies, signs, portents, and wonders.'[5] Frye has similarly brought out the popular, folk tale, or mythical features in almost all the comedies and romances, but not all the time, I believe, with success. His comments on Measure for Measure, for example, I find rather unsatisfactory. There are undoubtedly folk tale and mythical elements in the story: Isabella's chastity may be thought of as full of magical efficacy, and the duke in disguise is a familiar motif in stories from several countries, though not necessarily in folk tales. But this is hardly sufficient ground for dismissing the discussions of the play as a problem comedy.

Nevertheless, it can be accepted, I think, that Shakespeare's art, certainly in the comedies and the romances, is, in Frye's terms, 'popular', 'conventional', and 'primitive'. In fact several critics have argued that Shakespeare manages, even when using literary sources, to 'regress', as it were, to the mythic source behind those sources. I have mentioned some of these critics in Chapter 6: William Archer, Irael Gollancz, Freud, J.I.M. Stewart, and others.[6] Frye demonstrates this tendency in Shakespeare to get to the mythical essence of his stories in greater detail than the previous critics, but in this aspect of his criticism he is not breaking new grounds but merely synthesizing the findings of earlier writers. G. Wilson Knight's emphasis on the 'miraculous' elements in Shakespeare's drama, especially in the romances, also relates to this emphasis on the archaic and the primitive or mythical rather than the naturalistic aspect of the plays. But there is a significant difference between Frye's and Wilson Knight's discussion of the 'incredible' scenes in the romances: the faith required for a proper response to such scenes is seen by Frye as a purely literary faith, a matter of a primitive response to the conventional story; but for Wilson Knight this faith is, to some extent, related to extra-literary faith in

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[5] Ibid., pp. 64, 67.

[6] See pp. 165, 179-80 above.

the non-rational or the intuitive as the only way of apprehending a supernatural reality.

Having demonstrated the conventional and the non-realistic nature of the comedies and the romances, Frye goes on to discuss the structure of the comedies and the relation of the comic structure to myth and ritual. Briefly to recapitulate what has already been discussed in Chapter 4, Frye argues that Shakespeare moves away from the local and the specialized and works towards uncovering 'a primeval dramatic structure'. This primeval dramatic structure is a direct descendant of rituals and myths. Again, this is not a strikingly original view of dramatic structure. Ritual, according to Frye is based on sympathetic magic. It is accompanied by a story or myth which establishes an inter-related significance among the various acts of the ritual. 'Literature, in the form of drama, appears when the myth encloses and contains the ritual.' This starts a pull away from magic: 'the ritual acts are now performed for the sake of representing the myth rather than primarily for affecting the order of nature'. But drama, which is born in 'the renunciation of magic', recaptures the magic in another way. Through the archaic forms of identity and analogy it assimilates the non-human world to the human.

Conventions are descended from myths. The shapes of the myth become the 'conventions that establish the general framework of narratives'. Since in myth there is 'identity of personal character and natural object', literary conventions help to recapture 'the pure and primitive identity of myth'. Frye's marked preference for the popular and the conventional is related to this idea that the conventions help to recapture the primal unity, the 'unfallen world'. However realistic the content of a work of art, its structure is a descendant of these conventions; thus, however 'displaced' a story may be, it represents, at bottom, man's attempt to recreate an unfallen world. Frye's preference is clearly for those works of art which are as little 'displaced' as possible, that is, works which belong to the category of romance and romantic comedy.

In fact the major purpose of Frye's theories seems to me to be the rehabilitation of romance.

Frye does not, it must be emphasized again, discuss the descent of conventions from myths and rituals in any historical sense. Myth, being a pure structure, that is, a story which is as little displaced from the structure of human desire as possible, enters literature as its structural principle. The structure of comedy is described in terms of elements of a composite ritual. The three important elements in this composite ritual are: the period of preparation (cp. Theodor Gaster's 'rites of kenosis'); the period of licence and confusion of values; and the period of festivity itself, the revel or komos (cp. Gaster's 'rites of plerosis'). Corresponding to these three elements of ritual are the three stages in comic structure, namely, an anti-comic society representing social reality; a temporary loss of identity, often symbolized by disguise; and the rediscovery of identity, individual, erotic, and social, symbolized by marriage.[7] Frye discusses the comedies in the light of this general description of the comic structure, but, as is usual with him, he does not undertake a detailed analysis of any one text. He is more concerned with the nature of Shakespearean comedy and of comedy in general. Indeed, his major concern is something even larger, the structure of the whole body of literature, and Frye's specific comments can never, I suggest, be adequately discussed without reference to his system as sketched out in Anatomy of Criticism.

Taken in themselves Frye's comments on comic structure and on the archaic and conventional nature of Shakespearean comedy and romance are, however interesting, not entirely original. At many places Frye seems to echo E. E. Stoll, another critic who explained characters and other elements in the drama in terms of conventions. Shakespeare's deliberate use of conventional elements in the last plays is also shown by Bethell in his book on The Winter's Tale (1947); Bethell's earlier

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[7] A Natural Perspective, pp. 73-8. For Gaster, see p. 38 above.

book on Shakespeare, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (1944) also discusses the conventional elements in the drama. On the comedies in general, Janet Spens has commented on the role of 'free life of the forest' and suggested that Shakespeare used a folk play as the nucleus of each of his comedies after The Two Gentlemen of Verona. In his comments on The Winter's Tale and The Tempest Frye owes something to G. Wilson Knight and Colin Still. I suggest therefore that to praise Frye for occasional brilliant local insights but to dismiss his system as useless, as Frank Kermode, Reuben Brower, and others tend to do, is to distort the whole purpose and achievement of Frye. As it turns out, the two comments of Frye that Reuben Brower selects for praise in his review of A Natural Perspective, namely, the comparison of episodes in The Tempest with the ordeals of Aeneas and the description of the structure of A Comedy of Errors as a metamorphosis structure, are not entirely original.[8] Both Wigston and Colin Still had referred to the Aeneid in connexion with The Tempest, and although no critic to my knowledge had previously referred to the metamorphosis structure of the other play, there were earlier comments on the theme of loss and reconciliation, as I have shown in Chapter 6, and this theme is, I suggest, not unrelated to what Frye describes as the metamorphosis structure. Furthermore, Frye's theory of the comic structure, in spite of its brilliant aperçus, is an extension of Cornford's discussion of comedy to cover practically the whole field of western literature. That itself is a great achievement but lesser, I think, than the systematic classification of literature which is, after all, really what Anatomy of Criticism is primarily concerned with. Frye's Shakespeare criticism in fact breaks very little new ground; it is interesting primarily because of the way it fits into his system, fits in, that is, in the context of the whole of literature as Frye sees this totality.

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[8] For Brower, see p. 88 above. Also compare Frye, 'Recognition in The Winter's Tale', in Fables of Identity, esp. pp. 117-18 and G. Wilson Knight, '"Great Creating Nature": an essay on The Winter's Tale', in The Crown of Life, esp. pp. 110, 128. See also S. L. Bethell, The Winter's Tale: A Study, esp. pp. 47-70, and the discussion of The Tempest in Ch. 6 and of The Two Gentlemen of Verona in Ch. 7 above.

This is brought out very clearly if we examine his book on the tragedies. As far as originality is concerned, this book breaks even less new ground than the previous book. However, in the context of Frye's system his description of the tragic structure acquires greater interest. Frye conceives of the tragic structure as 'a reversal of the structure of comedy'. This is in keeping with his relating tragedy with the mythos of autumn and comedy with the mythos of spring in the Anatomy. In tragedy, according to Frye, instead of a drive toward identity there is a loss of identity, both social and individual. There is a third kind of identity which is found in comedy and lost in tragedy, namely the dual or erotic identity. Corresponding to these three types of identity that are lost in tragedy, there are three main kinds of tragic structure in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries; first, the tragedy of order, which presents the loss of social identity, and may also be described as 'the tragedy of the killing of the father' (e.g., Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Hamlet); secondly, the tragedy of passion, which presents the loss of dual or erotic identity, and may be described as 'the tragedy of the sacrifice of the son' (e.g., Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, Troilus and Cressida, and Coriolanus); and thirdly, 'the tragedy of the isolation of the spirit' which presents the loss of individual identity (e.g., Lear, Othello, Timon). There are two ruling conceptions in tragedy, the order of nature and the wheel of fortune. 'The order of nature provides the data of the human situation, the conditions man accepts by getting born. The wheel of fortune supplies the facta, what he contributes by his own energy and will.' The former conception provides the ironic vision and the latter, the heroic. This again fits in very neatly into Frye's schema of the four mythoi, each of which is the polar opposite of another, and which moves in a semi-circle between the other polar opposition. Thus, tragedy is the opposite of comedy, but at one end it approaches romance and at the other, irony. The heroic vision is, of course, the romantic vision. In tragedy the ironic vision survives the heroic one, 'but the heroic vision is the one we remember, and the tragedy is for its sake'. This familiar conception

of tragedy as man kicking against his fate is related implicitly to Frye's concept of desire and repugnance as the dialectical basis of myth and literature. In the tragedies of order, the ruler who has been murdered is associated with the 'dream of a lost paradise'; there is thus, in this type of tragedy, a feeling of 'lost social identity'. The tragedies of passion are 'Shakespeare's version of the tragedy of the son'. The hero in this type of tragedy resembles Dionysus 'in his role as a dying or suffering god'. Just as Dionysus is closely associated with a female deity, a form of Mother Earth, so also the heroes in these tragedies love women who have all 'the white goddess characteristics of someone whom it is death to love'. Even Juliet, according to Frye, has this characteristic, and something of the 'elusiveness of these figures comes into the raising of them to the upper stage'. In Coriolanus, Volumnia represents the white goddess in the maternal phase.[9] In the book on the comedies Frye had suggested that the comic heroines are the reverse of the white goddess figure:

> We may call this, the movement opposite to that of the white goddess, the cycle of the black bride. I take the word black from the Song of Songs, although Julia, Hero, Hermia, Rosaline, and Juliet are all associated with the word "Ethiop." The dark lady of the sonnets, of course, is a white goddess, as she should be in that genre. The ordeal of the heroine who seeks her lover through darkness, disguise, humiliation, or even death until she finds him brings her close to the folklore figure of the loathly lady, who must remove some handicap of slander, ugliness, or captivity before her identity is recognized.[10]

It is evident from the above exposition as well as from the passage just quoted that, as I argued in Chapter 4, Frye's interest is not primarily in the particular work, even in the work of Shakespeare as a whole, but rather than in the 'total form' of literature. The concepts of myth and archetype are important in Frye's criticism because

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[9] Fools of Time, pp. 5-6, 13-16, 35, 48-9.

[10] A Natural Perspective, p. 85; compare also the remarks of Wigston on Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It, Cymbeline, and the Sonnets cited in Ch. 6 above.

of this. It is in their role as structural principles of literature unifying the whole of literature that Frye's concept of myth and archetype are different from the allegorical-cum-typological criticism that we studied earlier. He rightly describes a lot of such 'myth criticism' as 'bad comparative religion'. Frye also describes most commentary as allegorization. Against it he proposes archetypal criticism, which is concerned with relating individual works to literature as a whole. 'Commentary,' he writes, 'which has no sense of the archetypal shape of literature as a whole . . . continues the tradition of allegorized myth, and inherits its characteristics of brilliance, ingenuity, and futility.' Such criticism has therefore to be supplemented by archetypal criticism. He writes: 'Things become hopeful as soon as there is a feeling, however dim, that criticism has an end in the structure of literature as a total form, as well as a beginning in the text studied.'[11] Frye's use of the concept of myth and archetype is directed towards this vision of literature as a whole.

Unfortunately, as I tried to show in Chapter 4, one's response to this totality of literature, this 'human apocalypse', may well be less profound than one's response to the individual work. Frye's own 'oracular harrumph' concerning this apocalypse, as well as one's own sense of cultural piety, might well bully one into submission and reverence toward this construct of Frye's, but that is a different matter. Tradition is not <u>out there</u> to be contemplated in awed reverence; it has to be constantly recreated, in each age and in each mind. Frye's apocalypse is one such construct, and one which is no doubt admirable in its elegance and clarity. But when one considers his Shakespearean criticism one cannot but have some doubts about its usefulness. Frye has made some very useful remarks about the conventional and primitive elements in the comedies and romances (though here his achievement lies in the synthesis of previous commentary on these lines). But I find the final effect one of anticlimax. What has Frye, after all, got to say

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[11] <u>Anatomy of Criticism</u>, pp. 341-2.

finally about the comedies and the romances? Only this: that the 'mythical backbone of all literature is the cycle of nature, which rolls from birth to death and back again to rebirth'; that comedy belongs to the second half of this great cycle; that Shakespeare's comedy, in particular, is closer to romance than to ironic literature; that the structure of romantic comedy is the structure of the Christian myth; that Orpheus, the traditional literary symbol of the magical identity of man and nature 'is the hero of all four romances'.[12] So much of this kind of thing had been said by G. Wilson Knight and others, as is brought out by the survey in Chapter 6. Frye's originality lies in the fact that he is reiterating the themes of the myth and ritual critics documented there with far greater theoretical awareness than they were capable of. But the theoretical subtlety should not obscure his basic similarity to them.

Lévi-Strauss's ideas on myth have not, as I suggested earlier, made their full impact on the practice of literary criticism. In another sense, however, the kind of thing that he is doing with myths has to some extent been anticipated in the spatial analysis of G. Wilson Knight, in which there is an attempt to see a play as a synchronic pattern of corresponding image-clusters and themes. Both modes of analysis, moreover, are directed towards the 'deep' rather than the surface structure of the work, the imagistic or thematic pattern below the level of plot and character.

I have discovered only three studies of Shakespeare's plays which make use of the ideas of Lévi-Strauss. In an essay in PMLA (1967) Jan Kott attempts to study the different variants of the stories of Hamlet and Orestes so as to get to the basic tragic structure or 'model' of which these variants could be said to be different realizations. Just as, according to Lévi-Strauss, myth has its own 'unchanging structure' independent of its various realizations, so also, according to Kott,

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[12] A Natural Perspective, pp. 119-21, 133, 147.

tragedies can be reduced to a few basic models or unchanging structures. This is the process of structural analysis, which, in contrast to the tracing of the sources of the stories, 'is an attempt to construct the model and define its variable realizations'. After this reference to Lévi-Strauss and structural analysis, Kott goes on to compare motifs in the different versions of the Orestes legend and the story of Hamlet in a manner which does not, except very cursorily, resemble Lévi-Strauss's kind of analysis. There are interesting points of comparison between Electra and Hamlet, and Electra and Ophelia, but Professor Kott's model of tragedy seems to owe more to his interest in the questions of choice and freedom and in the nature of the absurd than to the ideas of Lévi-Strauss. His conclusion is that 'the dramatic model of Hamlet-Orestes contains all human situations in which choice is enforced by the past, but has to be made on one's own responsibility, and on one's own account'.[13]

Peter S. Anderson (1969) applies Lévi-Strauss's ideas on the nature of sacrifice in a study of Julius Caesar. I am not sure whether I fully understand Mr. Anderson's argument, especially as he also employs the terminology of Husserl and the phenomenologists, the 'place-logic' of Ramus, and the typological considerations of Eric Auerbach. Indeed his essay is even more difficult to understand than the writings of Lévi-Strauss himself, and I can give only a brief account of what seem to me its salient points.

Mr. Anderson's essay elaborates the statement of Granville-Barker, quoted as its epigraph, that 'Pompey dead is to Caesar something of what Caesar dead is to be to Brutus and the rest.' Mr. Anderson sees the form (which he also calls the eidos) of the play as 'the mythic pattern of sacrifice in which Caesar is sacralized and victimized by his "sons" as they seek contiguity with the divinity Pompey'. The sacrificial object, according to Lévi-Strauss, is a medium of exchange

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[13] 'Hamlet and Orestes', esp. pp. 304, 309-10, 313.

between the deity and the worshipper. As such it is attached to both. The 'language' of sacrifice is a 'metonymic' language: the sacrificial victim is 'selected from a natural series to represent the series'. The fundamental characteristic of metonymy is 'displacement', and Mr. Anderson traces the element of displacement in the language and imagery of the play. (He also associates this 'displacement' with the terms 'dislocation', 'replacement' and 'exchange'.) Among examples of displacement are the following: the tradesmen in the opening scene are 'out of place'; the scarves on Caesar's statue are also considered to be out of place by Flavius and Marullus; Caesar repositions Calphurnia; and 'the battle of Philippi is lost by position'. The tradesmen's punning in the first scene is also, according to Mr. Anderson, a linguistic counterpart of the metonymic language of sacrifice. 'Pompey has been exchanged for Caesar. And with the tradesmen's linguistic chagrin at their chastisement ("they vanish tongue-tied in their guiltiness") punning is punished and guilt is associated with the language of metonymy'.[14]

Apart from the linguistic aspect of the language of sacrifice in the play, Mr. Anderson also traces the language of gestures and images. Thus, he notes the frequency of references to genuflection, which is the 'body attitude' of sacrifice. But in contrast with the genuflection of the conspirators, Caesar's body attitude is one of fixation: 'Caesar's body attitude of motionlessness, stasis, and fixation is significant for him, as it is for his position as sacrificial victim. It is his significant response to the significance of genuflection.' Mr. Anderson also comments on the way in which the sacral quality of Caesar is established and on how Brutus's suicide itself is also a kind of sacrifice; the spirit of Caesar now resides in his own body, and hence that body must be destroyed.[15]

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[14] 'Shakespeare's Caesar : The Language of Sacrifice', pp. 3-6, 8.

[15] Ibid., pp. 11-12, 25. See also pp. 41-2 above.

As I have said, it is difficult to follow much of Mr. Anderson's argument; it would therefore be futile to comment on it. But I believe he has made some very perceptive remarks on how the theme of sacrifice permeates the whole play. However, the prospect of such applications of the theories of Lévi-Strauss to Shakespeare is rather daunting.

Finally, in his unpublished doctoral dissertation to which I have already referred, Michael Howard Riley suggests a parallel between the function of myth as Lévi-Strauss defines it and the function of the shaman. Just as, according to Lévi-Strauss, the purpose of myth is 'to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction', so also the shaman is 'a "dramatic" model capable of (momentarily, histrionically) overcoming a contradiction'. The shaman, according to Mr. Riley, is a myth in that 'he bears witness to a spirit world and makes his audience believe in it'. Lear is such a shaman, who, in his entranced madness, 'creates an emotion, pity, which is capable of, momentarily, overcoming a basic contradiction in human behaviour'.[16] This contradiction, if I understand Mr. Riley rightly, is between the demands of family affection and political realities. One may perhaps accept the idea that tragedy is concerned with overcoming, or at least reconciling, contradictions in human experience, but the resemblance between Lévi-Strauss's logical model for overcoming contradictions, and Mr. Riley's dramatic (and affective) model is only a loose one, though perhaps rightly so.

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[16] 'Ritual and the Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy', pp. 183, 233. See also the discussion of King Lear in Ch. 7 above.

CHAPTER 10

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF SHAKESPEARE'S MYTHS

In Chapter 5 I tried to show that ideas about the relation between myth and society ranged from the belief that myth is not only prior to society, but the very thing which makes it a 'society' rather than a mob or a mere aggregate of individuals, to the belief that myth is nothing but the mere reflection, in a distorted or idealized form, of the material needs and relations in a society. I suggested that only the latter type of approach to myth could be properly called sociological. To consider myth as prior to and shaping society is to propound a metaphysical theory of society rather than a sociological theory of myth. A term used by Denis de Rougemont may clarify the distinction I am trying to make. In his book The Myths of Love, M. de Rougemont proposes 'the mythanalysis of culture' to replace reductionist analysis of cultural phenomena along Marxist or Freudian lines.[1] Against this mythanalysis of culture, we can place the cultural or sociological analysis of myth, which anthropologists from Malinowski onwards have tended to favour. Even Lévi-Strauss, who seems to be concerned with myth as the reflection of the human mind in general, does not ignore either the relation of a particular myth to other myths of the same community, or the actual physical and social environment within which that body of myths functions. (I do not, of course, intend to imply that there is a single sociological approach to myth or ideology. In fact the 'functional' approach of Malinowski and some sociologists would be the very opposite of the historical approach of the Marxists.)

Literary critics, on the other hand, tend to find the other

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[1] The Myths of Love, pp. 34ff.

approach to myth more congenial. With them myth is a value-laden term instead of a neutral one. This is borne out by the fact that there is far more of criticism of Shakespeare in terms of what I have described as the allegorical tradition of mythography than in terms of the role of myth in society. The idea of myth as a special mode of thought is perhaps more widespread and influential in critical theory (though not in practice) than the allegorical theory. But even within the framework of this approach to myth there is a division between Cassirer's relatively neutral phenomenological analysis of the mythical consciousness and the more 'metaphysical' approach, in which there is greater emphasis on the special status of the mythical mode of thought because of its supposed ability to grasp those aspects of reality which lie beyond the reach of analytical reason. Again, it is this latter view of myth which has been more popular among literary critics, though the number of studies actually applying either of these concepts of the mythical mode of thought to Shakespeare is very small, as was evident from the paucity of material for Chapter 8. In the light of the emphasis on the honorific use of myth that we find among literary critics it is not surprising that there is very little criticism of Shakespeare which makes use of the sociological concept of myth.

E. M. W. Tillyard's discussion of the use of the Tudor myth in the history plays of Shakespeare is really the only instance that I have come across in which the word myth has the sense of a story or a narration of historical events which serves to validate existing customs or institutions. Myth, in other words, becomes a synonym for ideologically distorted history. It might be argued that there is very little history that is not thus distorted and that Tillyard's statement that 'the Elizabethans took history in a much less detached way than we do',[2] is an over-simplification of the difference between Elizabethan and modern historiography. Indeed it is now fairly common to point to the mythical aspects of the writings of historians like Spengler and Toynbee.

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[2] Some Mythical Elements in English Literature, p. 45.

Besides, to use the term myth for such ideologically distorted history is to obscure the distinction between two different concepts of time. It will be remembered that Cassirer made a distinction between the mythical and the historical concepts of time: mythical time, or rather the time in which the events which the myth narrates are supposed to have taken place, is the time of the absolute past, the time of beginnings, rather than the relative past of the historians.[3] Among the Aboriginees of Australia, for example, it is believed that mythical events occurred in 'dream time'. Nevertheless, while it may be true that 'mythical' history is thus different from myth proper, it is at the same time similar with respect to the function that it performs within a particular culture, namely, the validation of present institutions and customs with reference to events in the past. At any rate the term myth is used in this sense, and indeed for any idea that is considered to be subjectively motivated.

Tillyard suggests that the Tudor myth was actually made up of two interrelated myths. The first of these derived from the shakiness of Henry VII's title to the English throne, and Tillyard describes it as the 'Myth of Pedigree'. According to this myth, Henry was a direct descendant of Cadwallader and also, in a vague way, associated with the second coming of Arthur. The second myth, according to Tillyard, was that 'the Tudors had been divinely appointed to put an end to a long spell of civil war and to lead the country out of an unspeakable tyranny into happiness'. Tillyard argues that Shakespeare thoroughly imbibed the Tudor myth, both from popular sources and from the Chronicles of Hall, and that the first tetralogy of the history plays is founded on it. Aspects of the myth are also to be found in the second tetralogy, though there are other complicating factors in this group. But the first tetralogy can, according to Tillyard, be described as truly mythical, in that it takes over and propagated a contemporary myth.[4] One could

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[3] See p. 60 above.

[4] Tillyard, op. cit., pp. 48-9, 53, 61-3.

also introduce the concept of ritual here (although Tillyard does not do it) to bring out Shakespeare's individual contribution to the myth. A myth by itself is only potentially a cohesive and adaptive agent. It is its ritual enactment or recitation that brings out its full power. Similarly, the historical myth concerning the rights and virtues of the Tudors becomes a truly potent unifying force in Elizabethan England only when enacted on the popular stage. The drama, in other words, performs the same function as ritual does in primitive society. And if we consider, as many scholars are now agreed, that Shakespeare may well have been an innovator in the field of historical plays, we would have to give him credit for bringing a national myth to a focal point in the communal consciousness. His role vis à vis the Tudor myth would thus not be one of mere passive acceptance of this myth and turning it into drama, but rather the much more active one of giving ritual form to it and thereby bringing out its full integrative power.

Critics are not in complete agreement, however, about Shakespeare's attitude to the Tudor myth. There are some who feel that Shakespeare's attitude is either ironic or ambivalent, especially in Henry V. A detailed discussion of this point would not be in place here, but I would like to mention briefly two critics who hold views different from Tillyard's on the role of the Tudor myth in the history plays. In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, J. P. Brockbank agrees with the general argument advanced by Tillyard but introduces some qualifications. He argues that while Shakespeare's orthodoxy concerning the Tudor myth cannot be denied it must also be pointed out that 'he tested Hall's myth thoroughly and critically and did not accept it casually and passively'.[5] More recently, Henry Ansgar Kelly has argued that in the histories, chronicles, and memoirs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we can discern not one but three myths about the period of English history from the time of Richard II to that of Henry VII, namely, the Yorkist myth, the Lancastrian myth, and the

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[5] Brockbank, 'Shakespeare's Historical Myth', p. 46.

Tudor myth proper. After a survey of these myths in a large body of historical writings of the period, he discusses Shakespeare's relation to these three myths and comes to the following conclusion:

> Shakespeare's great contribution was to unsynthesize the syntheses of his contemporaries and to unmoralize their moralizations. His genius for sounding the realities of human passion and action, which are the components and raw materials of historical reflections, enabled him to sort out the partisan layers that had been combined in rather ill-digested lumps in Hall and Holinshed and to distribute them to appropriate spokesmen. Thus the sentiments of the Lancastrian myth are spoken by Lancastrians, and opposing views are voiced by anti-Lancastrians and Yorkists. And the Tudor myth finds its fullest statement in the mouth of Henry Tudor. In this way Shakespeare often reproduces by instinct the viewpoints of fifteenth-century documents which for the most part were either completely unavailable to him or present only in their assimilated forms in the large compilations which he drew upon.[6]

In contrast to Tillyard., then, both Brockbank and Kelly suggest that the histories present a balanced critique of contemporary historical myths rather than a mere reflection of them. This view, it seems to me, does greater justice to the complexity of Shakespeare's drama as well as to the complexity and diversity of ideological positions within Elizabethan society. Not myth-making, then, but critique of myth would be a fairer description of Shakespeare's historical plays. At the same time, perhaps, the plays may also have served the mythical function of integrating the community by giving powerful expression to the nascent nationalism of the age and to the mystique of royalty.

As I argued in Chapter 5, the idea of myth is often associated with that of the organic community. An organic community is usually supposed to be held together by a common mythology rather than merely by material needs and relations. For T. S. Eliot, the Elizabethan age lacked 'a coherent system of thought' such as Dante could take for granted.[7]

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[6]Kelly, Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories, pp. 304-5.

[7]Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 136.

And although Eliot stresses the point that this does not mean that Dante is necessarily a greater poet than Shakespeare, it is clear that his preference is for the kind of society in which Dante lived (which is in keeping with the neo-Christian reaction against the Renaissance). We could, I think, following common usage, though perhaps with some distortion of Eliot's views, substitute 'mythology' for 'system of thought', and say that, for Eliot, Elizabethan society did not form an organic community because it lacked a common mythology. Other writers, however, argue that Elizabethan society did form an organic community and that it was much closer to the Middle Ages than to these sadly secular times, even though it left much to be desired by way of a system of 'orderly and strong and beautiful' thought. They also argue that Shakespeare's greatness is to some extent related to his belonging to such an organic community. I shall mention just one critic to illustrate this view.

I have already referred to Philip Wheelwright many times before and shall therefore deal with him very briefly. Wheelwright laments the loss of the 'mythico-religious consciousness' without which society becomes a mere mob instead of a genuine community. The two aspects of the mythico-religious perspective are a sense of togetherness and a sense of a transcendental mystery. As I have indicated earlier, there is no necessary connexion between even a genuine sense of togetherness (as opposed to mere collectivity) and a belief in what Wheelwright calls 'transcendental forces peering through the cracks of the visible universe'.[8] The haunting awareness of these forces can very well go with the most ruthless exploitation and self-seeking, and we have present day examples of societies which do seem to have a genuine sense of togetherness without the transcendental awareness. Besides, when Wheelwright argues (like many others) that myth is essential to the poet because it provides a background of familiar references by which the sensibilities of the poet and his readers are oriented, it is not clear why this background

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[8] See pp. 63-4, 100 above.

of familiar references must be 'myth' in his sense and not just any body of accepted beliefs. Moreover, to consider the loss of a widely shared body of myths as the cause of the writer's alienation is to mistake the symptom for the disease. The loss of a common body of knowledge and beliefs, insofar as it is common, may be a consequence of other and more material factors, such as changes in the economic structure of the society.

I suggested in Part I that among literary critics myth is more often associated with a belief in transcendental forces than with 'organic' community in the material sense (as in Christopher Caudwell).[9] This is brought out very clearly in Wheelwright's discussion of the myths of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, according to him, is great because even though in his time 'a more sophisticated attitude is beginning to set in', it has not yet made such headway as to 'drain the myths of all vitality'. These myths that Shakespeare could fall back upon, and which give unity to his work are 'the myth of love and the myth of divine and earthly governance'. There is a third 'myth' running through the works of Shakespeare, and that is 'the myth of tragedy itself'. We in the modern age have lost this faith in the tragic myth and fallen back on the 'shabbier' myth of comedy. I do not see what all this has got to do with the ills of contemporary society, but Wheelwright is obviously agitated about them (which is why I have mentioned him in this chapter). I would like to end this section with a slightly lengthy quotation from Wheelwright's essay because in its sustained irrelevance to Shakespearean tragedy and comedy and to the problems of modern society it is, I suggest, symptomatic of a very common form of contemporary mythomania:

> We today have lost this sense of cyclical fulness and therewith of transcendental significance in human affairs; accordingly we no longer produce great tragedy because we no longer believe in the tragic myth. In its place we have substituted the shabbier myth of comedy, which Shakespeare utilized for

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[9] See pp. 103-4 above.

> a time and then, when it had lost its power to move him dramatically, unleashed his contempt by expressing it as the title of one of his worst plays, "All's Well That Ends Well." This wretched quarter-truth is exploited in most of the novels and nearly all of the movies of our day--no longer as healthy comedy merely, but decked out with the false sentimentality in the trappings that once belonged to tragedy. Our failure in tragic intuition, our substitution for it of bathos and business practicality in loose-wedded conjunction, is not the least among the disastrous factors of the contemporary world.[10]

So far I was discussing the concept of myth in its social aspect, but the function assigned to myth can also, mutatis mutandis, be considered as function of ritual, as I pointed out in Chapter 5. One such function assigned to ritual and myth by anthropologists is, to quote the words of Clyde Kluckhohn again, 'the gratification (most often in the negative form of anxiety reduction) of a large proportion of the individuals in a society'.[11] Even the Tudor myth as defined by Tillyard can be seen as a form of anxiety reduction, since, as Tillyard points out, it was Henry's sense of the shakiness of his title to the throne that produced the myth. The function of myth as defined by Lévi-Strauss, namely the overcoming of contradictions, can also be seen as one form of anxiety reduction, since all contradictions, even those of a logical and speculative nature, create mental tensions. Many of these contradictions, of course, are of a purely social nature. Kenneth Burke has used the concept of the scapegoat to analyse the ways in which a play attempts to resolve tensions which are either peculiar to a particular society or to human society in general. This, as I have suggested, is a more valuable application of the concept of ritual than the mere tracing of primitive ritual patterns in the plays.

Burke's analysis of Coriolanus is an example of this sociological extension of the concept of the scapegoat. He argues that since the play

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[10] Wheelwright, 'Poetry, Myth, and Reality', pp. 27-31.

[11] See pp. 98-9 above.

is a tragedy it will be concerned with 'some notable form of victimage' imitated for 'the purgation, or edification of an audience'. All the elements in the play are to be seen as relating to the fulfilling of the expectations and desires aroused in the audience. These expectations and desires will be shaped by conditions within the play. 'But,' Burke writes, 'the topics exploited for persuasive purposes within the play will also have strategic relevance to kinds of "values" and "tensions" that prevail outside the play.' Burke goes on to define these tensions as related to the conflicting claims of nation, class, family, and the individual, and suggests that although to some extent these conflicts are present in most societies, in Shakespeare's day they were felt more acutely because of such immediate events as the unrest caused by the Enclosure Acts, as well as because of the more gradual but still perceptible change from feudalism to nationalism.[12] Burke's historical analysis is meant to be suggestive rather than thorough, but I believe that he does suggest a very valuable way of reconciling the Aristotelian concept of catharsis, the anthropological concept of the scapegoat ritual, and the socio-historical analysis of works of art.

One of the advantages of Burke's use of the scapegoat concept is that analysis based on it can avoid the charge of reductionism that is frequently levelled against myth and ritual critics, and not always without justice. One of the reasons why the latter are reductionist is, I suggest, because they conceive of myth and ritual in an entirely non-historical manner. The problems that the myths and rituals are concerned with are thus formulated in extremely general terms like death and rebirth, sacrifice for the propitiation of the gods, expulsion of evil, and so on. Burke suggests, on the other hand, that the evil which is sought to be purged through scapegoat rituals is not evil in general, but tensions and problems peculiar to a given society. Thus, where John Holloway has to 'reduce' the diversity of elements in the plays of Shakespeare to a basic pattern which he finds recurring in the major

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[12] Language as Symbolic Action, pp. 81, 88-92.

tragedies, namely, the pattern of the increasing alienation and the final sacrifice of the tragic hero, Burke is able to relate this pattern of the scapegoat ritual to different tensions within the plays as well as in the society. In an analysis of Othello, for example, he argues that Iago, not Othello, is the katharma or pharmakos, his function being to purge the tensions inherent in what he describes as 'a tragic trinity of ownership in the profoundest sense of ownership, the property in human affections, as fetishistically localized in the object of possession'.[13] Similarly, Burke has discussed Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra in terms of tensions that Shakespeare tries to exploit for cathartic effects.[14] Burke conceives of the tensions as both socio-political and psychological, and in any case the line between the two cannot be easily drawn. Burke's discussions tend to be suggestive and exploratory rather than well-researched papers. Moreover, his style has become more and more difficult and allusive, too caught up in his terminological network,for any particular article to be easily comprehensible in itself. Nevertheless, I believe that an extension of anthropological and psychological insights to literature in the manner suggested in his writings is the most useful way of looking at the relation among literature, myth, ritual, and society.

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[13] Perspectives by Incongruity, pp. 153-4.

[14] Language as Symbolic Action, pp. 102-5.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is difficult to offer any simple concluding generalization about the contribution of the myth and ritual critics to the criticism of Shakespeare because, as we have seen, myth and ritual appear in very different contexts, and as parts of very different critical strategies. This difficulty would be a source of embarrassment but for the fact that there is so little certainty regarding the very identity of the myth and ritual critics. At the beginning of this work I quoted Weisinger's statement, made in 1957, that the myth and ritual approach was one of the high gods in the pantheon of contemporary criticism. But in an essay written just ten years later, Weisinger suggests that 'the study of myth is not nowadays so frequently practised in critical and scholarly circles as it used to be'.[1] Ten years was too short a time, one would have thought, even in these days of rapid change, for a god with a high place in the pantheon to lose his followers: even some pop stars manage to last longer. But, of course, it is futile to talk of the growth and decline of myth and ritual criticism without first clarifying who the myth and ritual critics are, and it seems obvious that Weisinger is not very certain about this. This uncertainty is very common, and I hope this work would at least help to identify these critics and also clarify the different ways in which the concepts of myth and ritual enter literary criticism. These ways of course, as we have seen, may have very little in common -- as little in common as, say, the criticism of Colin Still and C. L. Barber.

I have tried to show that contrary to the common impression, the majority of myth criticism owes little to the theories of Frazer, and

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[1] Weisinger, 'The Proper Study of Myth', p. 242.

even less to later anthropological theory. The predominant type of myth criticism is concerned with seeing Shakespeare in the light of the pattern of a 'universal tradition', or a 'timeless theme', or a 'monomyth'. The formulation of this universal pattern varies greatly, but some common themes recur, such as those of death and rebirth; the loss and regaining of paradise; unity, division, and a higher unity; the conflict of summer and winter; loss and rediscovery; estrangement and reconciliation. The overwhelming majority of myth criticism is concerned with tracing these themes in the plays and poems.

There is a fairly substantial body of criticism applying the ideas of Frazer and of the Cambridge anthropologists concerning the ritual origins of myth and drama. But many interpretations within the framework of the ritual theory could be considered as allegorical criticism of the kind studied in Chapter 6, because in them too there is an attempt to reduce the variety of primitive rituals to a single ur-ritual celebrating the different stages in the life of a year-daimon or a vegetation spirit. The idea of the tragic hero as scapegoat is more valuable, though the concept of the scapegoat has been extended to explain certain comic characters as well. Some critics associate the scapegoat also with the ur-ritual of the seasonal cycle, the scapegoat being taken to be merely the Old Year being driven away by the New. At the same time the Old and the New Year are held to be different manifestations of the same year-daimon. I have indicated some vagueness and inconsistency in the use of the scapegoat concept, and suggested that a psychological-cum-sociological extension of the concept may be critically more valuable. Applications of the concept of ritual also pose the critical problem of Shakespeare's attitude to ritual and to the ritual way of life. Opinions regarding this vary: many critics seem to be agreed that Shakespeare often presents ritual in an ironic or tragic light, though there also seems to be a consensus that there is no fundamental questioning of belief in ritual. From such critics one could conclude that the plays are not rituals but rather the critique of rituals. If, in spite of this, one were to describe Shakespeare's attitude

as mythical or ritualistic, then one would have to make it clear that such an attitude is very different from the primitive mythical attitude insofar as it asserts the value of myth and ritual in spite of doubts. Shakespeare's faith would thus be more like the faith of some of his critics than like the simple faith of the primitive.

The ideas of Cassirer about the mythical mode of thought have not had the same influence on critical practice as they have had on theory. In any case, the idea of a peculiarly primitive mode of thought seems rather dubious in the light of intensive field-work among primitive tribes. Moreover, Cassirer extends the terms myth and mythical so much that sometimes it becomes difficult while reading his books to relate his insights to any actual myth. Nevertheless, I believe that some interesting use of his analysis of mythical thought could be made for analysing some aspects of Shakespeare's language and thought. An honorific attitude to the mythical mode of thought is more common among literary critics, though once again we can discern a division of opinion. Shakespeare is thought of as reflecting a mythical rather than a positivist attitude, but at the same time his plays are also held to present myth in crisis.

The ideas of Lévi-Strauss have not yet made any great impact on the criticism of Shakespeare, but his method of analysis of myths may be applicable to literary works. Besides, his idea of myth as a logical model capable of overcoming contradictions is highly suggestive. It can be linked to Marxist or other kinds of analysis of social contradictions, and to Freud's analysis of psychological conflicts. It is itself, I think, an extension of Marxist and Freudian analysis of oppositions at the level of the deep structures of social institutions and individual creations. Many critics have analysed imagistic oppositions in the plays of Shakespeare. In the light of Lévi-Strauss's theory of myths, we could try to see whether such oppositions could be related to 'contradictions' within the mind of Shakespeare and in Elizabethan society which his 'myths' were intended to resolve. But these are rather

vague and tentative suggestions which may well lead one into a blind alley, or, more likely, into a reformulation of familiar ideas in an unfamiliar jargon.

Northrop Frye's contribution to myth criticism lies in his attempt to divest myth and ritual of their extra-literary associations and to make them purely determinants of literary structure. His main difference from the allegorical critics lies in his divesting the idea of the ur-myth, the 'timeless theme', of its 'oracular harrumph' in order to use it as a sort of 'fiction' to organize the whole body of literature. But the oracular harrumph reenters through the back-door. Basically, Frye is also concerned with Shakespeare in the light of the monomyth -- this time defined as concerned with the loss and regaining of identity. But the loss and regaining of identity is only another way of describing the loss and regaining of paradise. In the light of Frye's critical theories, many of the critics discussed in Chapter 6 begin to seem far less absurd than one would normally consider them to be.

Finally, the sociological approach to myth and ritual has not found favour among the majority of literary critics. This may be a reflection of the ideological orientations of the critics. I have suggested that the use of the concepts of myth and ritual in the manner of Kenneth Burke's criticism should be valuable, though, again, such suggestions have to be tested by actual criticism.

Broadly speaking, then, myth in contemporary literary criticism has still got the primarily honorific sense of a story which conceals a profound truth. Very often the idea is given a greater complexity by insisting that this truth could not be conveyed in any other way, myth being, in this respect, different from allegory. But this does not prevent the critic from allegorizing the myth. In fact the more 'mythical' a work of art is in this sense, the more numerous are the possibilities of allegorical interpretations. Perhaps the converse is even truer, namely the more numerous the possibilities of allegorical interpretations, the more

mythical would the work become. Clearly, Shakespeare is mythical in this sense, having undergone so many transformations during the three and a half centuries since his death. It is hardly surprising that even so protean a concept as myth is unable to catch the even more protean, shape-shifting genius of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare may be thought of as mythical in another sense. In the light of our knowledge of the social role of myths and rituals in primitive cultures, it is possible to argue that Shakespeare and his plays have a mythic function in British culture. There is the obvious way in which Shakespeare can be seen as a British culture-hero. But his plays may be said to be mythical in yet another sense. Every community or nation has its myths which give it its sense of identity and purpose. These myths may take the form of stories about gods, or they may appear as just distorted history, but their purpose is the same. And it seems to me, though I am hardly competent to make such a generalization with any authority, that the way the vast majority of the British see themselves, which means, in part, the way they see their past, has been greatly influenced by Shakespeare's version of British history. G. Wilson Knight has been among the very few critics who have emphasized this aspect of Shakespeare. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that he is the first poet of British nationalism,and that this is an important aspect of his continuing popularity in this country. More than that, in his history plays, with their culmination in the prophetic vision of Cranmer inspired by the infant Elizabeth, we see, as it were, the birth of a new nation. And it is with this nation that the modern Englishman still seems to identify himself.

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CR : The Centennial Review

JAAC : The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism

MLQ : Modern Language Quarterly

SP : Studies in Philology

SQ : Shakespeare Quarterly

SS : Shakespeare Survey

SSt : Shakespeare Studies (Cincinnati), ed., J. Leeds Barroll

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